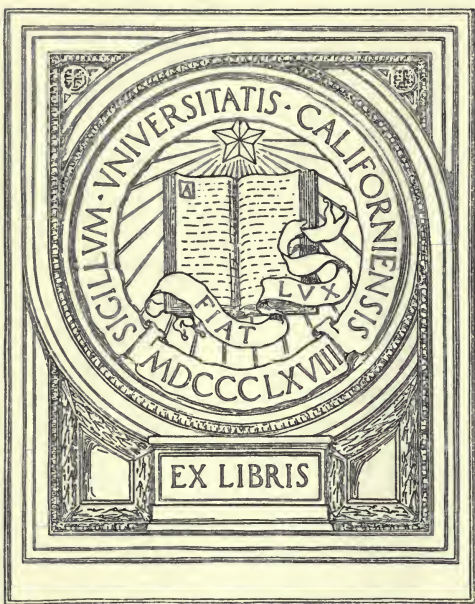






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THE FORCING HOUSE

BY ISRAEL ZANGWILL

THE FORCING HOUSE
BY ISRAEL ZANGWILL
WITH A FOREWORD BY
THE AUTHOR
LONDON
J. M. DENT & CO. LTD.
1908
PUBLISHED BY THE
AUTHOR
AT THE
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BY THE
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J. M. DENT & CO. LTD.
LONDON

BY THE SAME AUTHOR.

Uniform with this Volume.

THE WAR GOD

A TRAGEDY IN FIVE ACTS.

THE NEXT RELIGION

A PLAY IN THREE ACTS.

PLASTER SAINTS

A HIGH COMEDY IN
THREE MOVEMENTS.

THE MELTING POT

A DRAMA IN FOUR ACTS.

THE COCKPIT

A ROMANTIC DRAMA
IN THREE ACTS.

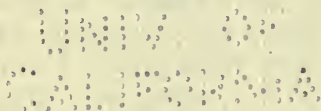
THE FORCING HOUSE

OR

THE COCKPIT CONTINUED

BY ISRAEL ZANGWILL

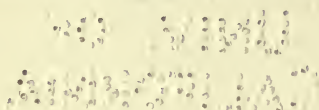
TRAGI-COMEDY IN ¹¹ FOUR ACTS



LONDON: WILLIAM HEINEMANN

1922

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TO MAURICE MAETERLINCK

MY DEAR MAETERLINCK,—

The coincidence that this play was written in your neighbourhood, and that "The Cockpit" of which it is the sequel was dedicated to your first translator, our common friend, Sutro, suggests my inscribing it to the memory of the holiday month you and I spent together twenty years ago, tramping the delectable regions you have since chosen for your dwelling-place. In those sunlit winter walks, eternalised in your exquisite essay on "The Sources of Spring," a frequent theme of our discussions was the nature of Time. You in those days favoured a fixed Eternity in which the future already existed as much as the past, so that one could imagine going backwards or forwards in it: a conception since illustrated by the cinematograph. I on the other hand was all for the essential reality of Time, with an insistence that would now be called Bergsonian, and I would have none of the fatalism involved in your conception. A tramway-collision, immediately after one of these discussions, left me injured and you unhurt but the argument anent Fate unimpaired on either side. I could wish, however, that you had been in the right and that it were possible to go back in Time, to tread over again those rocky olive-green by-ways and track together the sources of our springtide.

The nature of the Drama was not, so far as I remember, ever debated with my fellow-Peripatetic. Possibly I acquiesced in the profound preface you had contributed to friend Sutro's first published play,

“The Cave of Illusion,” in which you lamented that the decay of supernatural beliefs had robbed the dramatist of that background of depth, mystery and grandeur against which the figures of the classic tragedies had been set. Possibly I sympathised with the demand in your essay on *Le Tragique Quotidien* for a Drama of the Future, which should be almost a still-life drama : inasmuch as for us cultured moderns crude external violence had almost vanished from the planet, so that “we who lived far from blood and cries and swords,” whose “tears had become silent, invisible, almost spiritual,” felt on visiting a theatre, as if we were “passing some hours with our ancestors.” The Sage sitting by his lamp, a hand opening or closing a door, a ray of light through a casement, a shadow on a blind, these, you urged, were the only legitimate effects open to the modern dramatist, if his colour-scale was to be as subdued and subtle as life’s. Assuredly your own contributions to this quietist theatre—immortal creations like “L’Intruse” or “Intérieur”—had not disposed me to question its programme—would indeed you could “recapture that first fine careless rapture!” They may even have disposed me to accept the optimism of your subsequent essay on *Le Drame Moderne*, in which, anticipating a clarification of the human conscience and a broadening of human love, you looked forward to a theatre whence not only external violence but even ugly internal passions should be banished, “a theatre of peace, of beauty without tears.” Perhaps if I left that phase of serene faith unquestioned, it was because of your impatience with the scepticism of the race of Eccle-

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siastes. And yet it was the Pagan poet of an imperial people who saw that tears are not to be banished, that the texture of life, even at its peace fullest, is irretrievably tragic : *sunt lachrymae rerum*.

Ten years after you had penned this dream of "a theatre without tears," your country was invaded. You had said that "violated virgins and imprisoned citizens" were but the outworn motifs of the obsolescent theatre of "blood, external tears and death." Alas, you now saw all Belgium as a violated virgin, your own tears fell over "ruins and sacrifices, nameless tortures and numberless dead," and in your philippic, "The Hour of Destiny," the whilom Pacifist philosopher urged revenge and destruction "root and branch," "even against our own sense of pity and generosity." I did not need your assurance to me that you had modified your view of the scope and function of the modern stage. Your play, "The Burgomaster of Stilemonde," was your own most eloquent comment on your early conception, if indeed "Monna Vanna" had not anticipated its awakening to the "external" world.

But what you had felt constructively as a poet, lesser souls had been feeling in their negative prosaic fashion. In an essay on "The War and the Drama," I pointed out that among our dramatic critics—drawn for the most part from the genteel circles of a sophisticated and pacific civilisation—a similar reaction against violence had taken place, if without the Maeterlinckian profundity. They had seen the drama become—in the Robertsonian theatre—a storm in a teacup. They had seen the disappearance of the

robustious actor and the growth of the natural, if not always audible, *jeune premier*. They believed—with that admirable light comedian, Sir Charles Hawtrey—that the day of the high tragedian was over, though he might linger on in those occasional galvanizations of Shakespeare which piety for the dead classics would continue to inspire. But, in truth, Shakespeare seemed as barbarous to them as he had seemed to Voltaire. In their ignorance of life, all the flamboyance of passion and colour, all the odd gleams of purity and beauty, all the pathos and grotesquerie that challenge the artist's eye from Clapham to Martaban, had ceased to exist for them when those things went out of fashion on the stage. All characters not common as city clerks were improbable; sentiments not expressed currently in drawing-rooms were fustian. They recognised comedy by soda-water syphons and cigarettes, and melodrama by pistols. That pistols might consist with comedy, or cigarettes with tragedy—even blank verse tragedy—they could not conceive.

But it was not a dramatic critic, it was a thinker—and no lesser thinker than George Santayana—who as late as 1913 complained, if not quite in the schoolboyish spirit of Stevenson and Henley yearning for bloodshed, that “the hue of daily adventure is dull . . . our bodies in this generation are generally safe and comfortable . . . the whole drift of things presents a huge good-natured comedy to the observer.”

Personally I was saved by my daily business of plucking Jews out of the pale of Christian massacre from regarding modern life as altogether “a huge

good-natured comedy." That generous spirit, Octave Mirbeau, who had hailed you as "The Belgian Shakespeare," gave in one of his books so heartrending an account of a pogrom in Russian Jewry, taken from the life—or should one say, the death?—that no Parisian critic had any excuse for thinking that the spectacle he beheld from his club window exhausted the contingencies of contemporary existence. There was in fact even before the war so much mass-tragedy in being—one need only mention the Congo or Armenian atrocities—that it should not have needed the explosion of Europe to confound Mr. Santayana's "observer." It should not have needed famine and pestilence, poison-gas and flame-propellers, cannibalism and the return of the wolf, the murder or exile of Emperors, the overthrow of dynasties and economic systems, to remind him over what a thin volcanic crust our "huge good-natured comedy" went a-tripping.

Yet even after all these experiences, so accustomed had our urban civilisation become to its drab surface and its shallow security, so set is the human mind, in which prepossession is nine points of the law, that despite the monstrous happenings in Ireland at this very moment, a drama holding up the mirror to natural phenomena of this order is still liable to be classed as "melodramatic." The word was recently applied by a critic to a revival of an old play of mine that had come straight out of the heart of my work for Jewish emigrants.

Not that my critic understood that "melodrama" taken literally is the art of Æschylus or Sophocles. He used the word in that debased sense which it had

acquired in our popular theatres, wherein strong situations are dissociated from psychology or probability, and life is distorted by sentimentality, and destiny moves—in a reversed Hellenic direction—to a happy matrimonial ending. These transpontine theatres had become the sole purveyors of the drama of violence, to them all strong situations had been surrendered, and their presentation of incidents cut off from character had led to the notion that what constituted melodrama was its situations. But if theatrical situations rooted in psychology be melodramatic, then those plays of Racine which the Comédie Française interprets with such impressive art, would have to come under the condemned label. There is an excellent word “dramatic” which seems to have gone quite out of fashion. It should surely be revived, for it covers ground otherwise undefined. The name of Sardou—that master of dramatic technique—is rarely mentioned nowadays without a sneer. I used to speak of him myself as a stage-carpenter. But closer acquaintance with his plays and especially with his prefaces has convinced me that, although he may have sometimes divorced incidents from their roots in psychology, he was as frequently dramatic in the best sense, and that his starting-point was not so much *une scène à faire* as a moral idea. His play with the unfortunately melodramatic title of *L’Affaire des Poisons*, contains one of the noblest characters and some of the finest scenes known to me in all drama. In conceiving the drama as primarily dramatic, Sardou was superbly right. The drama should be dramatic, just as the stage should be stagy. The

obloquy attaching to staginess was originally aimed at its transference from the stage to real life. As dirt is matter in the wrong place, so staginess is manner in the wrong place. It is by a curious retroversion that censure is associated with staginess even in the right place. There was finality in the dictum of Goethe that we call Art Art because it is not Nature.

The fact that the drama is meant to be acted, places it in a specific category of Art, differentiates it from all other forms of literature, and removes it irrevocably from realism in any narrow sense. It must weave at once with a double thread a play as well as a story. Confined to a few feet of space, and a few hours of time, it must achieve a concentration and a tenseness undemanded of the novelist. Though the tension may be relaxed in comedy, in serious work a slackening is fatal. But to be serious about trifles is absurd, so that if strong passions and situations are withdrawn from the legitimate area of the dramatist's art, the drama proper must inevitably perish, and the comedian reign sole, "*vacuô in aulâ*."

So far, however, from such narrowing of the drama's scope being necessitated by the nature of our epoch, it is melodrama, almost in its popular signification, that the war has vindicated. Life, I sum up the lesson, is still heroic and vulgar in the grandiose old fashion. There are soldiers, not chocolate but iron, there are traitors and bullies. There are clamorous and riotous crowds that pillage and run amok, there are love-makings and clownings under the shadow of death, there are monstrous coincidences, impudently improbable. Even the spy does, it appears, really exist.

Nevertheless Heraclitus was right, and the same river never runs twice into the sea. The drama, if it is to go on holding "the mirror up to nature," must show the age its particular "form and pressure." It is clear that the author who assigned this function to the drama would not have been writing Shakespearean plays, had he lived to-day. The occasional exploitation of "the divine William" is less a sign of grace than of the dearth of a living poetic drama, and our stage, in which he alone represents high art, makes on me the effect which I have elsewhere compared to that of a savage dressed exclusively in a top hat. The safe and obvious resource of managements or actors aiming at classic rank or the reputation of culture, Shakespeare but serves to bar out still more effectually any attempt to replace or supplement his artistic convention, or to express, if I may misapply Whitman :

"Years of the modern, years of the unperformed."

As the Bible has become the enemy of religion, so is Shakespeare the enemy of the British drama.

How far the blame for the absence of a modern heroic drama is to be divided among dramatists, managers, critics and the public is a complex question. That the fault lies more with the managers than with the public may be seen from the steady success of high art at such a People's Theatre as the Old Vic. But the dramatists have also their share of responsibility. There is indeed, as Santayana complained in 1913, a decay of seriousness in all the arts which are—"like truant children who think their life will be glorious if

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they only run away and play for ever ; no need is felt of a dominant ideal passion and theme, nor of any moral interest in the interpretation of nature." One can imagine that the war would not have lessened Santayana's sense of the need of an art not all play. It set M. Victor Giraud, the editor of the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, expressing this very demand for a "dominant ideal passion and theme," as well as a "moral interest." He echoed too your old cry for a modern framework. The war, he urged, with its great moral issues and its high fate-driven personages had provided the themes, it but remained for the modern dramatist to find the framework. With all respect, it seems to me that a modern picture is infinitely more important than a modern frame. Your new "internal" theatre may have needed a new framework and you found a beautiful one, but seeing that the old "external" theatre of violence must persist in the mirror of art, is it really necessary to look "behind the looking-glass"? Our Thomas Hardy invented for his epical drama of "The Dynasts" a new machinery of Spirits of Irony and Pity. But for all the conviction they carry, he might as well have reanimated the archangels of Milton. "Life itself," as I urged in the essay already cited, "offers every element of pathos and mystery, of horror and devilry, that poetic dignity demands. Out of the clash and conflict of the forces of life the modern dramatist may build a tragedy as noble and unadorned as a Doric temple rising 'twixt sea and sky on its rocky headland."

This present play makes, of course, no pretence to be that tragedy. It even labels itself a tragi-comedy.

Its order of architecture is Corinthian, not Doric, for it is difficult to handle in simple tragic outline a theme so complex, so bristling with contemporary questions and problems. The theme is at any rate immune from the danger of critical ignorance of its existence. "Bolshevism" indeed has become an obsession: it is one of those words which people put into their mouths to steal away their brains. That is why I have tabooed the word in my play. Socialism or Communism had been in the air all my lifetime and long before I was born. An infinity of treatises, novels, journals, plays and speeches in every language under the sun had dealt with it. I myself had weighed its pros and cons twelve years ago in my "Italian Fantasies." "We are all Socialists now," said that distinguished English statesman, Sir William Harcourt, who was already dead a decade before the war. Yet to-day Socialism sets the mouth of the world agape with horror as at some dread diabolical novelty fallen suddenly from the blue. Only less comic than this consternation of "the bourgeois" is the dismay of the Socialists, their haste to disavow their progeny.

For my own part, nothing that has happened has contradicted my published prevision of the course Socialism would run, and my handling of the theme dramatically would have been substantially the same had Russia been as imaginary a country as my Valdania, though I have, of course, profited by the Russian experience to add a concrete touch or two. There is, equally of course, no attempt to photograph facts and personages. The artist needs free elbow-room and must profit by his "poetic license." As

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Renan pointed out in the preface to his own play, *Le Prêtre de Nemi*, by the side of real history there is also ideal history which has not occurred literally, and yet is essentially a summary of historic realities. No less apposite is his remark in the same preface that it should be impossible to refute a thorough work of art, for "the other side of every thought ought to be indicated in it, so that the reader may seize at one glance the two opposite sides of which the truth is composed." The Jewish psychology of Trotsky offered a rich and tempting model, but it would have over-weighted the theme and I set him aside for a simpler type of leader. Moreover Russia is not the only country where the dread "new" disease has raged. The pioneer country seems to have been Mexico, and you may be interested to hear that the young man who took a snapshot of you, when you lunched with me at my hotel, was the son of the very President of Mexico in whose period of office "Bolshevism" broke out. Naturally he supplied me with vivid details of the movement that had ruined his family and made of him a precocious Conservative.

My Prologue is already too long, but looking over what I have written, I find a certain farcical futility in writing on the philosophic aspects of the theatre, when the main factor of that institution is economic. In a country where, despite Matthew Arnold, the theatre remains unorganised, where there is no care for art nor curiosity about life, can one erect a noble contemporary drama upon a paying basis? How far those cynics are right who reduce all history, however high-flown, to economics I will not pretend to determine. But the

economic basis of drama is unfortunately beyond question.

“The drama’s laws the drama’s patrons give,
And they who live to please must please to live.”

The Utilitarian Philosophy had a formula which might almost have been invented to express the secret of dramatic success. The play must produce “the greatest happiness of the greatest number.” It must express, therefore, the lowest common measure of culture, the most normal emotion and vision. Mr. Bernard Shaw, in his preface to one of his plays, calculates at seventy or a hundred thousand the number of patrons who must indirectly put their money together to enable a play to run. But in these days, when to score your century on the stage no longer demonstrates success but merely the avoidance of failure, a hundred thousand spectators will not carry you very long. And Mr. Shaw has omitted the most important item in the calculation. For “the first hundred thousand” must precipitate themselves in the first hundred days, nay, the signs of the rush must appear from the moment of production. “Delays are dangerous,” says Bacon. But in the theatre they are fatal. That leisurely respite during which the book may educate taste, win appreciation and gather momentum is impossible in a theatre, where at least a hundred pounds are oozing away every evening. Thus the herd mind must not only find itself mirrored in the play, it must discover this at once and be drawn theatrewards, “as the deer breaks, as the steed breaks.”

Hitherto London managements have been prepared to accept moderate houses all the week, provided they could rely on "bumper houses" at the two Saturday performances. But it now appears from an interview with a manager that, by reason of the rising prices, a play will have to be withdrawn, unless at every performance it can "play to capacity." The gravity of this situation is obvious. It lowers still further the quality by extending the quantity of spectators necessary to make ends meet. And if relief is sought in higher prices, the public may be still more driven to the cinema, with its smaller demand on the pocket as on the brain. Between this Scylla and Charybdis the finer forms of drama must surely suffer shipwreck.

Shakespeare said "all the world's a stage." It is a pity he spoiled the profundity of the remark by detailing the sense in which he meant it. It is in the social comedy that men and women are "merely players." (Shakespeare should have written "players" in Greek—"hypocrites" to wit.) And the players themselves, being merely men and women, are equally compelled to the hypocrisy of life. The theatre's form of the social comedy is to run a business under the guise of an art. In his green-room slang, the actor has always called his play-house a "shop." He should now call it a gambling-house. For it is no longer run even as an industry, but persists by a perpetual change of ruined speculators, lured on by the dazzle of the few lucky punters. Save in two or three theatres, in which the presence of an actor-manager or an ambitious tyro gives a certain constancy, there is no

stage in London whose fare is fixed, still less does any exist constituted to receive such pieces as "The Forcing House." In your timeless Eternity it may for aught I know, be already in performance—even on the films—but it was assuredly not inspired by any hopes of gold or glory from the contemporary stage.

And yet it was not designed any the more for a "closet drama." But fortunately the dual nature of the drama, which can exist without actors, though the actors cannot exist without it, makes it possible for a drama written expressly for ultimate or posthumous performance, to enjoy a sufficient life in its literary embodiment—or disembodiment. Through this medium I have had almost as much pleasure from Mr. Drinkwater's "Oliver Cromwell"—a play that I am sure, will pay when some manager with boldness and brains arises—as from an actual performance. In reading French plays—those of François de Curet for example—I have enjoyed myself more than at most French theatres, and without the drawbacks of the journey, the price of a stall, or the elderly French harpies. The concentration of life, which is drama, the rapidity with which one arrives at the essence of the situation, is infinitely exhilarating after the average novel, especially to one who can read a play as a musician reads a score—and for those who cannot it should be eked out by stage directions and descriptions, first found, I believe, in the published plays of Oscar Wilde.

The practice of publishing new plays is growing in England and contributing by reflex action to the elevation of our literary standard of drama, already

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improved by the accession to the theatre of almost all our men of letters (though they give it only their second-best). "I always say to dramatists, publish your play," Henry James observed to me once. "Publish your play if you are not ashamed of it. Let us see what your success looks like in cold print." The practice was indeed dismally discouraged by the Press, for, while the author was hoping to bring his work before a higher and more leisured court than the bench of dramatic criticism, he found his book almost invariably dismissed with the words: "Text of the play produced at the so-and-so Theatre." You could not even "publish and be damned." If, on the other hand, the play had not been produced, it might not be noticed at all. "The published play seems to be the Cinderella of literature," a boycotted dramatist lamented. He must have forgotten Cinderella's ultimate fate.

But even for the non-production of a play on the stage there is ample compensation. I am not thinking of the freedom from stage censorship, for the thought of the Lord Chamberlain, though he still keeps a play of mine under embargo, has never hampered my pen in the faintest. Nor have I in mind the inevitable materialisation and refraction which made Charles Lamb prefer Shakespeare unstaged, and impaired for me the charm of your own "Blue Bird." No, the compensation is physiological. For while play-writing, despite all the pains of parturition, is life-enhancing, play-producing is life-destroying. Business managers were sufficiently katabolic, but no self-respecting man of letters can have truck with mere

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gamblers. Even contact with one's actors, delightful as they can be, and much as they may vivify one's work, is not conducive to longevity. My youthful epigram that for the actor, despite Euclid, the part is greater than the whole, has had a flattering currency. But it has not changed the player's psychology. Even such a lord of the European stage as the author of "Pygmalion"—we gather from a managerial indiscretion—has not been spared desperate combats with his leading lady. Whether under the Socialism he favours he will be able to tame his tigress, or whether he himself will find his own claws pared, is an interesting speculation, with which I ring up the curtain on this tragi-comedy of Communism.

Commending it to your gracious mercies and hoping that my association of it with your name will not tend to diminish your friendship,

I am,

Cordially yours,

ISRAEL ZANGWILL.

Midsummer, 1922.

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ:

RIFFONI VITTORIO	.	.	.	<i>A Socialist</i>
PROFESSOR SALARET	.	.	.	<i>A Socialist Writer</i>
COUNT CAZOTTI	.	.	.	<i>Prime Minister of Valdania</i>
BARON GRIPSTEIN	.	.	.	<i>A Financier.</i>
DUKE D'AZOLLO	.	.	.	<i>Formerly Ex-Regent of Valdania</i>
MARSHAL ROXO	.	.	.	<i>Ex-War Minister</i>
COLONEL MOLP	.	.	.	<i>Head of the Royal Body-Guard</i>
CORPORAL VANNI	.	.	.	<i>Of the Palace Guards</i>
BRIO	.	.	.	<i>Gripstein's Majordomo</i>
OMAR	.	.	.	<i>Gripstein's Doorkeeper</i>
MARGHERITA	.	.	.	<i>Queen of Valdania</i>
LIVIA (BARONESS	SIGISMONDO			
GRIPSTEIN)	.	.	.	<i>Gripstein's Daughter-in-Law</i>
SIGNORA DA GRASSO	.	.	.	<i>Wife of a Valdanian Landowner</i>
COUNTESS CAZOTTI	.	.	.	<i>Wife of the Prime Minister</i>

Guests, Lackeys and Guards

The action passes in our day at Scaletta, the capital of Valdania.

ACT I. in Baroness Gripstein's salon, ACTS II., III., and IV. in the former Throne Room of the old San Marco Palace.

(In the description of scenes, R. and L. stand for Right and Left of the actor, not the spectator, from whose point of view they can be read transposed.)

THE FORCING HOUSE

Act One

[*The scene is a salon in BARON GRIPSTEIN'S house at Scaletta, the capital of Valdania, on a spring evening. The room has been made by dividing and partly modernising a vast ancient banqueting hall, the unseen portion of which, behind modern folding doors in the rear wall, constitutes the dining-room. The furniture is massive, and there are tapestries and old oil-portraits and religious pictures, but the mediæval gloom, which the electric candles in sconces cannot quite dissipate, is dispelled by the masses of hot-house roses in the great old vases. In the lower part of the left wall is a tall Gothic leaden-paned casement with a cushioned seat, opening on the courtyard. The original old doors, oaken and brass-studded, are in the centre of the right and the upper part of the left wall. OMAR, the Moslem doorkeeper, clad in fez and robes, is going out obsequiously L., when he is recalled by the magnificent majordomo, BRIO, who, attired in Western evening dress, is holding in his white-gloved hand a menu and a music-programme, both printed on satin.*]

BRIO

Wait, Omar. I forgot to explain to you that when Her Majesty arrives, she cannot be left like the other

guests to come upstairs of herself. The Baron must be already below to welcome her. And the Baroness Sigismondo, too, of course, since she is acting as hostess for her father-in-law. See that you warn them in time.

OMAR

But how, Signor Brio, shall I know when Her Majesty is arriving? I am not a prophet of Allah.

BRIO

A gendarme from the courtyard must apprise you.

OMAR

It is a word of wisdom. But would wisdom had inspired Colonel Molp to plant more gendarmes! Already the courtyard is invaded and the carpet and the awning are besieged by a godless crowd.

BRIO

Not so godless, Omar. Open that window and you will hear them crying out against the Jew's presumption in entertaining the Queen of Valdania.

OMAR [*Firing up*]

It is their own presumption, if you will forgive mine, Signor Brio. Since it pleases Her Majesty to honour our master. . . .

BRIO [*With a wry face*]

Our *master*! Well, well, these are hard times, Omar. But what need was there for the Queen to stoop, too?

However, I see you Moslems are at heart more for the Jews than for us Christians.

OMAR

It is only Her Majesty that I have at heart, Signor Brio.

[The handle of the door R. of the men turns.]

BRIO

Hush ! To your duties.

[As OMAR goes out by the door L. BARON GRIPSTEIN enters by the door R. This florid but white-haired and sympathetic personage of Semitic appearance is dressed for dinner and wears the sash of the Order of the Redeemer. HE has at this moment a nervous, even fussy, air.]

BARON GRIPSTEIN

The Baroness Sigismondo not down yet, Brio ?

BRIO

It is much too early, Excellency.

BARON GRIPSTEIN

Not on an occasion like this. Ha ! Is that the menu ?

BRIO *[Giving him the satin sheets]*

This is the menu, and this the music-programme.

BARON GRIPSTEIN

Debussy, Strauss, Wagner—but there's not a single one of the Queen's compositions !

BRIO

Baroness Sigismondo's orders, Excellency. Her Majesty dislikes hearing her own compositions except accidentally.

BARON GRIPSTEIN

Ah, if my daughter-in-law arranged it——!

[*Returns programme*]

Who painted this menu?

BRIO

Klingermann, Excellency.

BARON GRIPSTEIN

But he's a German artist, not a Valdanian.

BRIO

There were not enough first-class native artists to go round. I consulted the Baroness. Your Excellency was so busy with the Bosnavinian Loan.

BARON GRIPSTEIN

But Klingermann is even a Jew! I shall be accused of patronising Jews! . . . Her Majesty's menu—that at least is Valdanian?

BRIO

By Delsio!

[*Apologetically*]

But I had to pay him two thousand lire.

BARON GRIPSTEIN

Bravo!

BRIO

It is a water-colour of the Valley of the Vaar.

BARON GRIPSTEIN

In Bosnavina ? But the Queen dislikes any reminder that she is Duchess of Bosnavina ! She hates our having seized our neighbour's territory, and she regarded Governor Marrobio's assassination by a Bosnavinian patriot as a righteous nemesis.

BRIO

It is a womanly weakness one does not take seriously, Excellency.

BARON GRIPSTEIN

One takes it so seriously, Brio, that the Bosnavinian Loan was designed by Cazotti as much to pacify Her Majesty as Bosnavina. And it is wonderful how the inflow of capital is already quenching the ardour of Bosnavinian patriotism. In vain Rolmenia will now throw oil on the flame. Ah, Cazotti is a wonderful statesman. Don't you think so, Brio ?

BRIO

It is wonderful how he is always Prime Minister !

BARON GRIPSTEIN

Ah, I see you do not share my enthusiasm. But opinion is free in Valdania—thanks to Cazotti again. I suspect you heard him slandered in the circles from which I took you.

BRIO

They said he began on a tub and would end on the throne.

BARON GRIPSTEIN

That sounds like the Duke D'Azollo. But his only tub was his journal, and considering it was he who set the Queen on the throne——!

BRIO

There are stories, Excellency, that he could not help himself; that so far from his having saved her from her mother's fate by bringing her up in a Roman convent, the princess was really discovered by Roxo in America!

BARON GRIPSTEIN

Really, really, how the ducal circle can fabricate such myths or you swallow them——!

[With sudden agitation]

Why is there no ham on the menu? I particularly said——

BRIO

There is, Excellency. With the madeira. The eleventh course before the sorbet.

BARON GRIPSTEIN

Oh, ah! I beg your pardon. But it is so unobtrusive. Ha! So you did get enough early strawberries!

BRIO

But they made me pay through the nose, those Jew monopolists——

[*Stops and coughs confusedly.*]

BARON GRIPSTEIN

Business is business, Brio. We Valdanians are too hard on the Jews. The Queen loves strawberries and the Comptroller can't afford them yet for the royal table.

BRIO

And yet your Excellency admires Cazotti! Surely he ought to allow Her Majesty more money.

BARON GRIPSTEIN

Impossible with our post-war taxation. It would set all the Socialists shrieking. . . . I am glad to find *you're* not a Socialist, Brio.

BRIO

I? I would smoke them out like wasps.

BARON GRIPSTEIN

That's Marshal Roxo's recipe. But these drastic methods are incompatible with democracy.

[*Handing back the menu*]

See that this Klingermann menu is put in *my* place. And give the Valley of the Vaar sketch not to the Queen but to Marshal Roxo. . . .

[*BRIO bows*]

The *chef* is satisfied?

BRIO

He says that not since he created the pink luncheon for the Grand Duke of Baden the day the Kaiser——

BARON GRIPSTEIN

Ach, do not raise these melancholy memories. What shadows we are, Brio, even the greatest of us !

BRIO

I do not consider myself a shadow. And I shall yet live to see all the royal houses flourishing again.

[Exit by the folding doors, giving a glimpse of the dazzling dinner-table with more roses, and hovering lackeys.]

BARON GRIPSTEIN

These cheery Valdanians !

[After an instant of musing, he looks nervously at his watch. Then the door R. opens and the BARONESS SIGISMONDO, a young Valdanian lady with a distinguished face and bearing, comes in. Her gown is simple but exquisite, and her only jewellery is a pearl necklace]

Ah, Livia, at last !

LIVIA

At last ? I am a full half hour too early ! I hurried my toilette, knowing you would be ramping like a lion.

BARON GRIPSTEIN

Never mind—how could you make yourself *more* beautiful ?

LIVIA

Make myself ? One would think I were the Countess Cazotti.

[Moves to adjust the roses in a vase.]

BARON GRIPSTEIN

Don't laugh at your old father-in-law. He's not used to making gallant speeches. But you might have worn his diamond necklace.

LIVIA

I'm wearing his pearl one.

BARON GRIPSTEIN

Pearls are at such a discount, now they can be made artificially.

LIVIA

I am not casting them before swine. . . . Do put away that watch—one would think you had never seen the Queen.

BARON GRIPSTEIN

I've never seen her in my house. And how can I be too grateful for the lead she is giving Society ? Everybody will come now.

LIVIA *[Drily]*

Except the Duchess D'Azollo.

BARON GRIPSTEIN

But, *cara*, she's coming to-night !

LIVIA [*Still arranging roses*]

The Duchess enjoys providential headaches. I know her from my maid of honour days. She has never forgiven me for marrying a Jew.

BARON GRIPSTEIN [*Agitated*]

A Jew? My Sigismondo is not a Jew! When was Sigismondo converted to Judaism?

LIVIA

Yes, I know it's only a religion. But somehow—anyhow the Duchess considers herself better-born than the Queen.

BARON GRIPSTEIN

But how is that possible?

LIVIA

Ask Sigismondo. He has all the genealogies at his fingers' ends.

BARON GRIPSTEIN [*Suddenly covering his eyes
and sobbing*]

Oh! Oh! Oh!

LIVIA

O my dear father! What is it?

BARON GRIPSTEIN

It is only at his fingers' ends that Sigismondo can have anything. My poor blinded boy! And he won't even see the Queen in our home!

LIVIA

He is very happy in his library, typing his history of Alpastroom.

BARON GRIPSTEIN [*Hysterically*]

I wish Alpastroom had never existed—it was in trying to emulate our mediæval hero that Sigismondo——

LIVIA

Don't, father. It was during the war with Bosnavina that I learnt to love Sigismondo. And genius like his conquers even blindness. He knows exactly where I have to look for a date or an episode.

BARON GRIPSTEIN

Ah, Livia, you are eyes to me as well as to him. Bereaved of wife and eldest-born, but for you I should have gone down in blackness to the grave. . . .
Carissima!

[*Embraces her.*]

LIVIA [*Disengaging herself gently*]

Don't ruffle the hostess's chevelure.

[*OMAR enters through the door to their left and presents to the BARON a card on a silver salver.*]

BARON GRIPSTEIN [*Wonderingly*]

"Riffoni Vittorio; *La Sera*"? But I can't see a journalist now.

OMAR

So I told him, Effendi. But he says his business burns.

BARON GRIPSTEIN [*Fretfully*]

Yes, I know. But tell him I've already sent the press the list of guests.

LIVIA [*Shocked*]

Eh ? . . .

[*Grimly*]

And now, I suppose, he expects the menu.

BARON GRIPSTEIN

Ah, yes.

[*To OMAR*]

Give him a menu.

LIVIA

No, no !

BARON GRIPSTEIN [*To OMAR*]

Not a real menu, of course, with a water-colour. A copy.

OMAR

I understand, Effendi.

[*Salaams and exit.*]

LIVIA

Oh, Baron, you are hopeless. Why did you send out the list of guests ?

BARON GRIPSTEIN

To seal our position, of course.

LIVIA

Considering the Queen's visit has precisely that gracious object, you might have left the publication to the Court chronicler.

BARON GRIPSTEIN

He would have published only the dinner-guests, not the reception list.

[*Re-enter OMAR.*]

OMAR

I have given him the menu, Effendi, but he stands like a pillar.

LIVIA [*Angrily*]

He won't go?

OMAR

Not without a word to Baron Gripstein.

LIVIA

You see! Now that you have conceded the creature the menu, he renews his hope of an interview. . . .

[*To OMAR*]

Tell him the Baron has nothing to say for publication.

[*OMAR salaams and exit again.*]

BARON GRIPSTEIN

I suppose because the paper is now mine, the fellow thinks——

LIVIA [*Shocked*]

You've bought the *Sera*? The Socialist rag that is egging on the peasants to claim the land!

BARON GRIPSTEIN [*Smiling*]

That is why Cazotti gave me the hint to buy it up.

LIVIA

Oh, I see.

BARON GRIPSTEIN

Yes. Its effect on the peasants one does not take seriously, especially as they can't read. But it began running a translation of a boycotted American book by the notorious Nicholas Stone called *The Nemesis of Nationality*, which urged that in this latter-day world of heavy armaments, nationality is a luxury beyond our means. Even the middle-classes, groaning under the post-war taxation, began to ask, Does patriotism pay?

LIVIA

You were quite right to stop the paper.

BARON GRIPSTEIN

No, no, *cara*—we haven't stopped it. Under the new editorship *La Sera* can be made a respectable property—respectable in every sense. We haven't even stopped the Nicholas Stone serial. But I understand that by a little judicious mistranslation, it is coming to a *sounder conclusion*. Ha! ha! ha! Not a bad joke, Livia.

LIVIA

But surely, Baron, that's not fair to the American author !

[*Re-enter OMAR.*]

OMAR

The pillar still stands, Effendi.

LIVIA

What ! Why have you not thrown him out ?

OMAR

I took counsel of Signor Brio. But he feared, with the crowd round the house——

BARON GRIPSTEIN

Brio is quite right. We cannot have a scene to-night. Tell the man I'll see him in the morning. . . .

[*Apologetically to LIVIA*]

One *must* see journalists—they have such sharp quills.

LIVIA

Not when one owns their papers.

BARON GRIPSTEIN

The same man writes on other papers—even opposition papers.

LIVIA

How horrible !

BARON GRIPSTEIN

They are no worse than barristers.

[*To OMAR*]

What are you waiting for ?

OMAR

For an instruction. The man will surely again refuse to go without a word from you. Shall we throw him into the crowd ?

LIVIA

Of course.

BARON GRIPSTEIN [*Agitated*]

No, no, Livia. And we *must* get rid of him before Her Majesty arrives. Lucky I came down so early. Tell him, Omar, I will give him five minutes at once——

[*OMAR salaams and exit*]

And his dismissal from the paper to-morrow. And you will have five minutes to change to the diamond necklace.

LIVIA

I had better employ them in inspecting the dinner-table.

[*Goes to central folding doors. Pauses*]

Will you never remember—— ?

BARON GRIPSTEIN [*Rushing to open the doors*]

I beg your pardon.

[*There is again a glimpse of the rose-crowned table, BRIO, and the hovering lackeys.*]

LIVIA

And don't forget on the other hand that you must make no special fuss of the Queen, beyond our going down to receive her. . . . And not a word to this interviewer about Her Majesty or ourselves—especially in a paper of your own. I don't know why Society nowadays puts itself on the level of dancers or cinema clowns that live only by the breath of the mob.

[Exit as OMAR ushers in RIFFONI VITTORIO, taking his hat and stick. The newcomer is a magnetic figure in the prime of early manhood with a long, powerful, clean-shaven face and the eyes of a fanatic. His clothes, though he is not in evening dress, are sufficiently well-cut and brushed to account for OMAR'S indecision. In his hand he holds a copy of the menu.]

BARON GRIPSTEIN *[Very cordially]*

Ah, Signor——

[Looking at card still in his hand]

Riffoni. I was sorry to be unable to receive you immediately. And even now——

[Takes out his watch.]

RIFFONI

The five minutes, Baron, will be ample.

BARON GRIPSTEIN

Ah! Won't you take a seat?

RIFFONI

Thank you.

[Sits.]

BARON GRIPSTEIN

I fear we must not touch upon the honour Her Majesty is doing me.

RIFFONI

I never meant to touch upon it.

BARON GRIPSTEIN [*Disconcerted*]

No—precisely—er—do you smoke ?

RIFFONI

I neither smoke nor drink.

BARON GRIPSTEIN

A paragon among us Christians ! Then we can go on talking here.

[*Sits*]

For of course the room in which I receive Her Majesty——

RIFFONI

Naturally.

BARON GRIPSTEIN

Not that anybody ever smokes in this room even when Her Majesty is not here. The Baroness Sigismondo, my daughter-in-law, who was a maid of honour, learnt repugnance to tobacco from her royal mistress, and even I am not allowed to taint our ancestral tapestries. It makes a difficulty when her aunt, the Grand Duchess of Carelia, who is fond of cigarettes——

RIFFONI [*Abruptly*]
I have come to talk about Salaret !

BARON GRIPSTEIN [*Startled*]
Eh ?

RIFFONI
About Salaret.

BARON GRIPSTEIN
Salaret ! What is Salaret ?

RIFFONI
You don't know the greatest man in Valdania ?

BARON GRIPSTEIN
Oh, it is a man.

RIFFONI
And the greatest in the world—except Nicholas Stone.

BARON GRIPSTEIN
Ah, a Pacifist ! . . .

[*Rising*]
Excuse me, are you still on the staff of the *Sera* ?

RIFFONI
Of course not. I was kicked out with Salaret when the paper changed hands. Did I give you my old card ? I should have given you this.
[*Produces another card.*]

BARON GRIPSTEIN [*Taking it*]

"Honorary Secretary of the Scaletta Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals."

RIFFONI [*With a grim smile*]

Editors included. At first we thought the *Sera* had been acquired by its new editor, Orosobonetti. But we have just traced the proprietorship to you.

BARON GRIPSTEIN

I see. But you take a strange tone if you wish me to put you back.

RIFFONI

Me? What do *I* matter? I was born with plenty of money and never clogged my wings with a wife. But Professor Salaret was a child of poverty and has fifty-five years and eight children to carry. His wife's money enabled him to give up his professorship and devote himself to Socialistic literature; but it was merely an annuity, and when she died, he had only this editorship to rely on. Of course I've done what I could, but the paper had already swallowed up most of my funds, and now his children are practically starving.

BARON GRIPSTEIN [*Moved*]

Poor things!

RIFFONI

The eldest son, Guido, who is just of age, is most brilliant—a real genius for chemistry. But had it not

been for the generosity of Komak, a fellow-student, he would not have been able to remain at the Technical College.

BARON GRIPSTEIN!

A genius for chemistry! But it is what our country needs.

RIFFONI

She needs his father more. Salaret must be restored to his editorship.

BARON GRIPSTEIN

But of course! I knew nothing of these changes in detail. But I can easily find another billet for Orosconetti, or whatever his name is.

RIFFONI

Ah, thank you. I expected to meet a monster and I find a man.

BARON GRIPSTEIN

Capitalists as well as editors should come under the protection of your Society.

[Holds out his hand]

And if you would like a subscription to it——

RIFFONI

How good of you!

BARON GRIPSTEIN

Of course this friend of yours will edit it in the new spirit.

RIFFONI [*Drops his hand as if stung*]
What ! As a bourgeois Cazotti organ !

BARON GRIPSTEIN
As a popular Liberal evening paper.

RIFFONI
How dare you insult the Master ? Salaret who has
given Valdania the new vision, whose whole life—— !
[*Chokes with indignation.*]

BARON GRIPSTEIN
You surely don't expect me to pay a man to saw away
the legs of my chair ?

RIFFONI
If it will prevent your own legs being sawn away.
As Pacifists, Salaret and I have never preached
violence. We have thought that the workers, being
the overwhelming majority, had only to return a
Labour Parliament to bring about the dictation of
the proletariat. But if you destroy our organ, if you
cut out our tongue—oh, don't you see that to take
away free speech is to deny the right of citizens to
reform their State from within, is to make us foreigners
whose only weapon is force ?

BARON GRIPSTEIN
But who denies you free speech ? Even my major-
domo stands opposed to my politics. Start another
organ.

RIFFONI

But where can we find a capitalist ?

BARON GRIPSTEIN

Ha ! ha ! ha ! Excuse my merriment. So even to destroy capital you need a capitalist ! What about the capitalist I bought it from ?

RIFFONI

There was no such capitalist. I thought I explained that Salaret had started the paper himself while his wife was alive, and that afterwards I helped him all I could.

BARON GRIPSTEIN

But what about the money I paid for it ?

RIFFONI

Salaret had to use that to pay off the printers' arrears.

BARON GRIPSTEIN

But I took those over, if I remember. Anyhow, Salaret sold me his own paper, and you accuse me of sacking him !

RIFFONI

He had to sell—else the printers would have stopped it all the same. But he had no idea that the buyer was your agent, and he fully expected to be kept on as editor.

BARON GRIPSTEIN

When he had failed to make it pay ? . . . How much did he owe the printers ?

RIFFONI

How should I know ?

BARON GRIPSTEIN

You sank your fortune in the paper, yet you never saw a balance-sheet ?

RIFFONI

A balance-sheet ? Salaret is a saint and a martyr !

BARON GRIPSTEIN [*Drily*]

And a true Socialist—willing to share your last lira.

RIFFONI

How dare you ! It was a privilege for me.

BARON GRIPSTEIN

Anyhow, even with your money and the money he married, he could not make the paper pay.

RIFFONI

That was not his fault. The price had to be doubled—printing is so dear nowadays.

BARON GRIPSTEIN

But why is printing so dear ? See how these Trade Unions cut one another's throats ! So the proletariat won't pay for your ideas ?

RIFFONI

They can't afford to.

BARON GRIPSTEIN

Not four soldi? But think what they spend on cinemas and cigarettes! No, no, Signor, it is clear your ideas are not wanted.

RIFFONI

Not wanted?

BARON GRIPSTEIN

Whatever is wanted is paid for.

RIFFONI

A pretty touchstone!

BARON GRIPSTEIN

The only scientific one. Face the facts, my friend.

RIFFONI

Then—do you suppose *you* are wanted to this extent?
[*Waves his arm round the room.*]

BARON GRIPSTEIN [*Complacently*]

To all appearance. Do not forget what Valdania was before I took her in hand. Hardly an industry, hardly a railway, a mass of peasantry exploited by the boyars. I have done more for the proletariat than all your Salarets.

RIFFONI

On the contrary. You are destroying their old feudal life. The boyar was a brother, if too much of a big brother. To-day in these industries of yours

every man is for himself and the devil for them all. Mother earth is paved over, masses slave or starve unnoted. And while a Salaret is thrown on the scrap-heap, some brainless prodigal son squanders in a night what would keep the Master and his family going for a year. What a system !

BARON GRIPSTEIN

With all its faults it is the only system that works. If the son is prodigal, it means the father has saved and slaved—and if he had not been able to pass on his savings to his son, would he have worked so hard ?

RIFFONI

So that is humanity's last word—to produce not for consumption, but for profit ! And to distribute so wickedly that your lazy luxurious childless ladies are living off mothers of the people—hardly recognisable as of the same species—with infants at their wizened breasts and a ragged brood at their skirts ! O the cry of the people—cannot you hear it day and night like the moaning of a wintry sea ?

BARON GRIPSTEIN

The last time I heard it was at the races, when it was jubilant over the victory of my filly, Margherita.

RIFFONI

They must have *some* outlet, these helots of our reeking alleys. Ah, Baron, why not help us to build a world of justice and common joyous labour ? Believe me, you would be happier than in this monstrous and brutal opulence.

BARON GRIPSTEIN [*Outraged*]
Brutal ? And my hospitals, soup-kitchens, orphan-
ages, free milk centres—— ?

RIFFONI
Blackmail to ward off revolution or to keep your
footing in society.

BARON GRIPSTEIN
Your five minutes are at an end.
[*Moves coldly away.*]

RIFFONI
You asked me to face the facts. Do you suppose
people come to you for your beautiful eyes ? Even
Queens, they say, need money.

BARON GRIPSTEIN
It is a scandalous suggestion—go, go !

RIFFONI
Even if Her Majesty takes no money from you for
herself, she takes it for her charities.

BARON GRIPSTEIN
And has she not given to mine ?

RIFFONI
You may be charitable in yourself, it remains true
that, in the words of Karl Marx, the thing you repre-
sent face to face with me has no heart in its breast.
And do you call it charity to give away what you

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never feel the absence of ? Have you sacrificed a single petal of your bed of roses ? You may throw the poor the thousands, you wallow in the millions.

BARON GRIPSTEIN

And divided among the poor, what would my millions amount to ? Not fifty lire per head. Kept together, they create industries, promote commerce, foster art. You, like Montesquieu's savage, would cut down the tree to gather the fruit.

RIFFONI

No ! But I would divide it equally. Look at the fruit on this menu alone !

BARON GRIPSTEIN

And would that equalise happiness ? My butler's boys came back from the war, but my eldest-born rots in the ravines of Bosnavina.

[Falls into a chair and covers his eyes.]

RIFFONI

I am sorry—but paupers too lost their sons. When I was a lad my little brother was drowned in the lake, but my father did not consider that this was a reason for eating more than his neighbour.

[Tears up his copy of the menu.]

BARON GRIPSTEIN *[Hardly listening]*

And my blinded Sigismondo ! Will you cut out one of *your* eyes and give him optical equality ? Ah, Signor, you make so much of poverty because you

have never known it. Otherwise you would have known that bodily hunger is not so horrible as this gnawing of the heart.

RIFFONI

Baron Gripstein is hardly an authority on hunger.

BARON GRIPSTEIN

Is he not ?

[Springs up]

And do you suppose he inherited this ?

[Waving arm round]

No, Signor, I was born in one of the reeking alleys you speak of—no, no, not here, in Germany—and my mother was one of those women of the people, torn between the babe at the breast and the brood at the skirt. There were ten of us, never knowing whether father would bring home bread or not, yet every Friday evening——

[Pauses abruptly.]

RIFFONI *[Interested]*

Every Friday evening——

BARON GRIPSTEIN

Yes—trumpet it to your papers if you like—it was the Jew-street I was born in. But the Sabbath hallowed it with peace. Ah, I have never been so happy since.

[Drops back into his chair and covers his eyes again.]

RIFFONI *[Half moved, half sneering]*

A pity you don't try to return to that happiness.

BARON GRIPSTEIN

On the road of life there is no returning. But do you think I could bear to go on treading it, if I didn't still believe in God ?

RIFFONI

God ! Ah, there we have it. God ! The belief that keeps this devil's system safe ! That takes away our responsibility, saps our effort——

[Re-enter LIVIA by the folding doors.]

LIVIA

Not finished yet ? You seem to have agitated the Baron. Please go.

RIFFONI

Not till the Baron has agreed to my terms.

LIVIA

Your terms ?

[SHE goes haughtily to the bell.]

BARON GRIPSTEIN *[Looking up wearily]*

Don't ring, Livia. The Signor will go quietly. He knows that the Queen is expected, that gendarmes lurk everywhere, and that at a movement of my finger he would be arrested.

RIFFONI

Gendarmes everywhere ! Ha ! ha ! ha ! So this is your beloved sovereign.

[Enter OMAR.]

BARON GRIPSTEIN [*Perturbed*]

Nobody rang.

OMAR

No, Effendi. But I thought that with the pillar still standing, you would wish to know that the Prime Minister's carriage has reached the courtyard.

LIVIA

Already ?

BARON GRIPSTEIN

He told me he would come early to get a private chat on the Bosnavinian Loan. . . . Thank you, Omar, you acted rightly. And will you see the Signor out ?

RIFFONI

But the Prime Minister is the very person I wish to meet !

LIVIA

This is outrageous. Omar, will you tell Colonel Molp—— ?

RIFFONI

Pause, Baroness, before you kick me out into a crowd composed not merely of idolaters of your goddess, but of worshippers of Salaret, to whom you and yours are but parasites upon Labour. And even to the idolaters, the thought of their girl-queen inveigled here by a Jew-financier—— !

BARON GRIPSTEIN [*Hastily*]

Omar, why are you not escorting the Prime Minister ?

[OMAR *salaams and exit. To LIVIA*]

Cazotti will deal with him.

RIFFONI

I hope so. For whatever Cazotti lacks, it is not prudence.

OMAR [*Re-appearing at door*]

His Excellency, the Prime Minister.

[COUNT CAZOTTI *advances and kisses the BARONESS'S hand. His short frame is tending to corpulence, but his conscious Napoleonic head is free from signs of spiritual growth. He wears many decorations.*]

LIVIA

Delighted to see you so early.

BARON GRIPSTEIN [*Shaking hands*]

But where is the dear Countess ?

CAZOTTI [*Smilingly*]

You know she prefers coming in Her Majesty's train.

BARON GRIPSTEIN

Ah, yes, of course, always so devoted to duty.

CAZOTTI [*Linking his arm in the BARON'S*]

And now, if the Baroness will excuse me, let us talk of my investments. You see the bonds at Amsterdam——

[*Pauses abruptly as he becomes aware of RIFFONI, who bows ironically.*]

BARON GRIPSTEIN

I am so sorry, your Excellency, but this man insists on meeting you.

CAZOTTI

Eh ?

LIVIA

We must humbly apologise. But you arrived before we could have him removed.

BARON GRIPSTEIN

He is taking advantage of the mob outside to blackmail me into reinstating the old editor of the *Sera*. There's his card.

CAZOTTI [*Perusing it*]

Oh, that gaol-bird !

RIFFONI

BARON GRIPSTEIN } Gaol-bird ?

LIVIA

CAZOTTI

Curiously enough the Minister of the Interior showed me his dossier only this morning.

RIFFONI

I challenge you to detail it.

CAZOTTI

You deny you have been in prison ? Why, you only just escaped execution !

BARON GRIPSTEIN

My God !

RIFFONI

Don't be alarmed. It was only for scattering Pacifist poems from my aeroplane during the Bosnavinian war. My father's *Songs of Brotherhood*.

CAZOTTI

We all believe in brotherhood. But that was not the moment.

RIFFONI

It never is. And so our streets are filled with noseless torsos, like the wreckage of ancient sculpture come to grotesque life. But if you think we shall for ever go to the shambles at the bidding of old men with shrivelled hearts and fly-blown brains—— !

LIVIA

How dare you speak like that to the Prime Minister ?

CAZOTTI

Oh, I'm used to it, dear Signora. The Labour Party in the Chamber is not large but it is vivacious.

RIFFONI

Shall I tell you something else that happened to me in the air ? I heard one day through the roar of my machine the hymns of both armies ascending to heaven in rival requests for victory. In the absence of God, I determined to answer their foolish prayer myself by giving them not victory but peace.

BARON GRIPSTEIN

A blasphemous lunatic !

RIFFONI [*Drily*]

Whose ambition is to leave the world a little saner than he found it. I tell you I will make a new heaven and a new earth—by making heaven *upon* earth. My father could only dream the dream—I, by realising it, shall best avenge his murder.

BARON GRIPSTEIN [*Shocked again*]

His murder ?

CAZOTTI

Your father was not murdered. He died of heart failure while on sentry duty at the Palace.

RIFFONI

To conscript a man of that age, and expose him in that frost !

CAZOTTI

We must all die for our country when duty calls.

RIFFONI

No ! Our country must die for us when duty calls. Nationalism is the enemy.

CAZOTTI

Aha ! Nicholas Stone ! . . . With these Pacifist sentiments of yours, how do you explain your behaviour on your release from the military prison ?

You sought to revenge yourself on my person, and, not finding me in the carriage, you insulted my wife and assaulted my coachman.

LIVIA

Ah, I remember the case. The poor Countess was a witness.

RIFFONI

A false one.

CAZOTTI [*Raising his fist*]

You dare——!

RIFFONI

Ah, now *you* will do the assaulting.

[CAZOTTI'S *arm drops*]

Your coachman was lashing his horses brutally because they refused to pass a piece of paper—perhaps

[*Smilingly*]

it was a page of the *Sera*. You know, Baroness, how horses yearn dumbly to us through their great tragic eyes. When I remonstrated with the brute—the real brute—he turned his whip on me. I seized the thong and was pulling him out of his seat when your perjured police came up.

CAZOTTI

The judge saw the facts otherwise. . . . No sooner were you released than you began a series of violent articles in the *Sera*.

BARON GRIPSTEIN

And he told me he never preached violence.

RIFFONI

A violent article is not one preaching violence. Not even prison and injustice could destroy my faith in the force of reason. Rotten houses fall of themselves. A gnat's bite will kill a man whose blood is purulent. And a society which makes it a crime to proclaim brotherhood, which would have shot me dead, had I not happened to have saved a brother-airman, though at the cost of sending his assailant crashing down in cinders—ugh !

[Covers his eyes]

Oh, how could I bear to live under an economic system which makes such things inevitable ?

CAZOTTI

It is to save you from living under it—so far at least as Valdania is concerned—that the Minister of the Interior has just signed an order for your expulsion.

RIFFONI

What !

LIVIA

Bravo !

BARON GRIPSTEIN *[Rubbing hands]*

Aha !

[All speaking simultaneously.]

CAZOTTI

You will pursue your quest for brotherhood and economic equality in some other country.

RIFFONI

I am to be expelled from Valdania ?

CAZOTTI

To-morrow morning. May I advise you to take advantage of this early information by hurrying home to wind up your affairs ?

RIFFONI

And that is your Democratic Constitution !

CAZOTTI

Democracy means that every man in Valdania has a vote. You will not be in Valdania. It is very simple.

RIFFONI

As simple as the way you crawled by slimy spirals to the summit of power. And under what law does the State exile its citizens ?

CAZOTTI

The first law of nature—the law of self-protection.

RIFFONI [*With set face and clenched fists*]

Ah, the party of force was right after all ! . . . So, unable to meet our arguments, you capitalist bullies, not content to cut out our organ of speech, cut us out of the realm altogether.

CAZOTTI

Us ?

RIFFONI

Salaret and me.

CAZOTTI

Oh, we are not deporting Salaret. He is not dangerous.

RIFFONI [*Dazed*]

Salaret is not dangerous ?

OMAR [*At door L., announcing*]

His Highness, the Duke D'Azollo.

[*Exit.*]

[*The DUKE, magnificently bestarred and beribboned, comes tottering and peering in. Age has wrinkled his fine features and reduced his snowy mane, but his smile is still fascinating. HE kisses LIVIA'S hand with the romantic courtesy of an earlier generation.*]

LIVIA

Delighted to see you looking so well. . . .

[*Ironically*]

The Duchess, I fear, has a headache.

DUKE D'AZOLLO

As you divine, alas !

BARON GRIPSTEIN [*Shakes his hand*]

I am so sorry.

DUKE D'AZOLLO

If it abates, she hopes to come in for the reception.

BARON GRIPSTEIN

So good of Her Highness to honour our humble home.

DUKE D'AZOLLO [*Peering*]

Ah, is that our perpetual Premier ?

[*Shakes hands with CAZOTTI, then stumbles on RIFFONI*]

Well, well, Vittorio, who would expect to meet you here ?

[*Wrings his hand warmly.*]

CAZOTTI [*Taken aback*]

You know him ?

DUKE D'AZOLLO

Am I not President of his Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals ? Or have I been superseded, Vittorio ?

RIFFONI [*Coldly*]

The Duchess sent me your resignation when I was imprisoned for assaulting Count Cazotti's coachman.

DUKE D'AZOLLO

But that was very wrong of you, Vittorio. How could the coachman help his master's misgovernment ? It is really very Christian of Cazotti to meet you like this. In future, my young friend, stick to your delightful articles.

CAZOTTI

You approve of his articles !

DUKE D'AZOLLO

What can be more digestive after a good dinner than a spirited denunciation of the sinfulness of eating it ? A Riffoni article with one's coffee is better than cognac.

CAZOTTI [*Sarcastically*]

If our host had only known, he would have put one on the menu.

DUKE D'AZOLLO

Tut ! Tut ! Our young friend is merely developing your ideas more logically.

CAZOTTI

My ideas ?

DUKE D'AZOLLO

Didn't your Government take possession of my finest farm for a munition factory ? As for your income-tax, it is only expropriation under another name. Your Finance Minister simply ruins my other creditors. He ! he ! he ! And this pretence of not being socialistic is the sillier because it takes in the masses, and thus you despoil us without appeasing them.

BARON GRIPSTEIN

There is something in that.

DUKE D'AZOLLO

And then isn't the State going to own my pictures ?

CAZOTTI

Only by your generosity.

DUKE D'AZOLLO

Not at all—by my dear Baron's.

[Claps GRIPSTEIN's shoulder laughingly. *The BARON makes deprecatory Oriental gestures*]

When he redeemed them from my creditors, he allowed me only a life-interest.

CAZOTTI

At any rate the State does not confiscate them.

DUKE D'AZOLLO

It confiscated alcohol-values in America. Everywhere in Europe it comes between the house-proprietor and his natural rent. Ah, it is clear the heyday of private property is over.

RIFFONI.

Bravo !

CAZOTTI

I am sorry to see the ex-Regent of Valdania coquetting with Communism.

DUKE D'AZOLLO

But why should not the State be run in peace-time with the same common devotion as in war-time ?

RIFFONI

Bravissimo !

CAZOTTI

That intensity of co-operation is possible only under deadly danger. Like deathbed repentance, it does not survive recovery.

LIVIA

And even under danger, Duke, it is not to be relied on. When I worked in the hospital, I found men who had mutilated themselves to escape service.

CAZOTTI

Exactly. As I found profiteers who had mutilated the State. Even the patriotic workers sent in their bills afterwards— Ha ! ha ! ha ! My dentist confessed to me that when he was first mobilised to look after the soldiers' teeth, he worked thirteen hours a day till his fellow-dentists laughed him out of it. Then he became a slacker like the others. No, no, Duke, State-interest cannot vie with self-interest.

DUKE D'AZOLLO

Yet self as the central principle of society is hardly compatible with our religion.

RIFFONI [*Drily*]

Nor did the early Christians possess private steam-yachts and picture galleries. St. Francis defined theft as keeping anything somebody else needed more.

DUKE D'AZOLLO [*Laughingly*]

This terrible Vittorio. He's not content I should coquet with Communism. He wants a marriage on the spot—a marriage of inconvenience! My galleries—you have already heard they are to go to the proletariat, though it prefers its pictures moving. But what would you do with my steam-yacht? Eh? Have fishermen spill their catches on its carpets and spit out their quids on its painted panels? Nothing is ready yet for your new system, my dear Vittorio. Give us time. Rome was not destroyed in a day. Life is compromise.

RIFFONI

Never! Life is sacrifice!

CAZOTTI [*To the DUKE*]

I beg you not to engage your friend in argument now. He has to go before the Queen arrives.

DUKE D'AZOLLO [*Turning to BARON*]

He is not staying to dinner?

BARON GRIPSTEIN [*Embarrassed*]

He—I——

LIVIA [*Feigning a smile*]

Can't you see, Duke, by his clothes?

DUKE D'AZOLLO [*Peering at RIFFONI*]

Eh? My sight is getting even worse than my memory!
[*Feeling in his pockets*]

I must have left my glasses in my overcoat.

[*Moves to door L.*]

BARON GRIPSTEIN

Let me send down for them.

DUKE D'AZOLLO

No, no, my pockets are still private property, eh, Vittorio? He! he! he!

[*At door pauses and turns*]

Talking of glasses, Vittorio, you Utopians remind me of a passage in an American author named—

[*Twiddles his thumbs.*]

RIFFONI

Nicholas Stone?

DUKE D'AZOLLO

No, no. *Santa Maria*, my memory! . . . Ah, Mark Twain! He went up Mont Blanc by telescope. That's how you Socialists go up your Mont Rouge—at a peep. Aha! but wait till you are actually among the crevasses and glaciers—

RIFFONI

We shall be roped together.

DUKE D'AZOLLO [*Moving back into room, prepared to argue*]

And together you will tumble.

CAZOTTI [*Almost pushing him out*]
You are forgetting your glasses.

DUKE D'AZOLLO
Santa Maria, I forget everything—except my manners.
[*Exit.*]

CAZOTTI
The old sinner. How he can mention that yacht of his without blushing——!

BARON GRIPSTEIN
Oh, but that's all over now. We go to early mass together.

CAZOTTI
It was high time—for *him*, I mean. . . . And now, Signor Riffoni, now that we have considerably concealed your painful position from your friend, the Duke, you will kindly take your leave before he discovers it.

RIFFONI
Take my leave? When it is my last evening in Valdanian society! No, no, let me see everybody—it is my last chance.

BARON GRIPSTEIN
You surely do not propose to be here when the Queen——!

RIFFONI

But I've only seen her caracoling in a colonel's uniform, goading us on to murder. A more intimate impression——

LIVIA

This is the climax !

RIFFONI

The crown, you should say. Will she wear it ? I have often wondered how the same crown fits all our successive sovereigns. I suppose their heads swell uniformly.

CAZOTTI

Stop this fooling and go !

[Takes out his watch]

I give you sixty seconds to clear out.

[RIFFONI drops into a chair and folds his arms.]

BARON GRIPSTEIN

Oh, your Excellency, you should not have told him of his expulsion.

CAZOTTI

It was an indiscretion, I admit. But there are ways of expulsion even from a salon.

BARON GRIPSTEIN

But he has his gang outside. Her Majesty must not be agitated.

LIVIA

Don't be so timid, Baron. The man cannot be here when the Queen——

RIFFONI

And has not every Valdanian the right to appeal to his sovereign ?

CAZOTTI

So that's your game, is it, to appeal against your banishment ?

RIFFONI

As if I would submit my natural right to the caprice of a pampered young woman. No !

[*Springs up*]

Let us two come face to face—the despised and rejected of Valdania with its idol and glory, the lowly peace-lover with the swaggering Amazon who drew the sword of Alpastroom !

BARON GRIPSTEIN

But she is *not* such an antithesis—she is rather——

CAZOTTI

Fifty-eight, fifty-nine, sixty !

[*Snaps watch-case*]

You permit me to ring, Baroness ?

LIVIA

Of course.

BARON GRIPSTEIN

For God's sake !

[CAZOTTI rings. Enter OMAR.]

CAZOTTI

Ask Colonel Molp to step in !

[RIFFONI sits down defiantly again. There is a tense silence during which the BARON opens his mouth agitatedly several times to address CAZOTTI or RIFFONI, but fails to say anything, and ends by wiping his brow. COLONEL MOLP enters by door L., a rather rough-hewn figure in evening dress with medals. HE bows to the company]

Colonel Molp, we wish you to prevent this man leaving the house——

[RIFFONI gives a murmur of surprise]

till Her Majesty is safely at dinner. Keep him under arrest and subsequently under observation till he is deported.

MOLP

Yes, Excellency. I know his record.

RIFFONI

I know yours. Janissary, spy, denouncer, agent provocateur——

MOLP [*Imperturbably*]

This way, Signor.

[*Motions towards door. RIFFONI with a sudden dart the other way opens the window, letting in the confused sounds of a mob. MOLP veers round.*]

RIFFONI

Back, or I appeal to our followers !

BARON GRIPSTEIN [*Beside himself, to CAZOTTI*]
I warned your Excellency——

CAZOTTI [*To RIFFONI*]

Close the window and you shall remain.

[*RIFFONI closes the window with a triumphant smile*]

Bring in your men, Colonel, they will cover him up from the Queen.

MOLP

Or draw her eyes to him. Her Majesty hates seeing *me*, much more my men. She refused our escort.

CAZOTTI

But suppose he is armed ! . . . If he moves a suspicious finger, use your dagger—not your pistol.

BARON GRIPSTEIN

God of Israel !

RIFFONI

You would murder me ?

CAZOTTI

Would you have us accused of collusion in the murder of the Queen ?

RIFFONI

I have no weapon except a fountain-pen. Do you suppose I would sacrifice my destruction of your whole social order to vengeance on your paltry Margherita ? The peasant must have the land, the workman the industries, the country peace—that's what I shall tell your royal Juggernaut.

CAZOTTI

With your fountain-pen. One word in Her Majesty's hearing and Salaret shares your exile.

RIFFONI

You brute !

[*HE collapses on the cushioned window-seat. MOLP takes up his post vigilantly beside him. Re-enter the DUKE D'AZOLLO, still peering but through eye-glasses. HE brushes by the astonished MOLP.*]

DUKE D'AZOLLO

Ah, Vittorio, glad you haven't run away yet. Because I *should* like to hear what you will do with my steam-yacht.

RIFFONI

I shall come back in her—with the Red Flag flying.

DUKE D'AZOLLO

Back ? You are leaving Valdania ?

RIFFONI

Needs must when the devil drives.

DUKE D'AZOLLO

But where does he drive you ?

RIFFONI

Up Mont Rouge.

DUKE D'AZOLLO

He! he! he! You are not the first whom the devil has taken up a high mountain. But can you really read Karl Marx? I'd sooner be expropriated. What does he mean

[Sits down beside him for a long talk]

by all that algebraical stuff about surplus-value ? . . .

OMAR *[Announcing at door]*

Their Excellencies, the Viscount and Viscountess Palestra.

[A pompous couple enters.]

LIVIA

So glad you could come.

[The VISCOUNT kisses her hand.]

BARON GRIPSTEIN

Welcome to my humble home. . . .

[Sotto voce to the VISCOUNT]

I managed to allot you those Bosnavinian bonds.

[The couple passes on to greet CAZOTTI.]

OMAR

Signor and Signora da Grasso.

[An elderly saturnine gentleman appears with a

*bouncing middle-aged beauty, whose natural charms,
though considerable, do not conceal art.]*

LIVIA [*As her hand is kissed*]

So glad to see you back in Scaletta. Your peasants
must have quieted down.

ESTER DA GRASSO

Yes, my husband soon stopped that nonsense of their
wanting our land.

LIVIA

Why, what did he do ?

BARON GRIPSTEIN

Don't tell us, please.

*[Quietly and with an uneasy look towards VITTORIO,
who is, however, engrossed in his argument with the
DUKE]*

The Socialists might hear of it.

[Lowering his voice further]

Even the Queen is capable of siding with the peasants.

ESTER DA GRASSO

I have no patience with what I hear of her.

BARON GRIPSTEIN [*Shocked and alarmed*]

Sh ! Sh !

OMAR [*Announcing*]

His Excellency, Marshal Roxo.

BARON GRIPSTEIN [*Darting forward in relief*]
Ah !

[*LIVIA checks him with a glance and HE returns sheepishly to her side. The MARSHAL, an ailing veteran, peppered with medals and orders, comes forward rheumatically to kiss her hand. The DA GRASSOS join the PALESTRAS and CAZOTTI.*]

LIVIA

Delighted to see you about again, Marshal ; by the way, have you your slip ?

[*HE produces a scrap of paper*]

Ha ! As I thought. But I'm afraid the Duchess D'Azollo is indisposed.

ROXO

All the better—no, I don't mean that. But I shan't have to give her the wrong arm.

CAZOTTI [*Advancing to shake hands*]

Ah, Marshal, how goes the enemy ?

ROXO

As you see—not formidable enough to prevent my sortie.

CAZOTTI

You are a wonderful man—we shall yet see you heading a new campaign.

ROXO

Not while you remain Prime Minister !

CAZOTTI

Ha! ha! ha! And the Queen thinks me so warlike. But the Bosnavinian business finished me. The old conquerors got loot, we moderns get income-tax! Not to mention loans to the conquered! I bless my stars that Rolmenia didn't call your bluff and fly to liberate Bosnavina.

ROXO

It wasn't me Rolmenia was frightened of, it was poor Marrobio. But now that she's got him safely assassinated——

OMAR [*Announcing*]

Their Highnesses, Prince and Princess Gondaroff.

ROXO [*To CAZOTTI, as the youngish PRINCE and PRINCESS advance to be greeted*]

Bosnavinians here?

CAZOTTI

You see the effect of the loan. But they are not the only Bosnavinians who prefer Scaletta and our culture, though the Queen fusses so over the compulsory Valdanian in their schools.

OMAR [*Announcing*]

His Excellency, the Rolmenian Minister!

[*A gorgeously uniformed and subtle-looking ancient advances.*]

CAZOTTI [*Sotto voce to ROXO as the Minister is being welcomed*]

Oh, do go and let him pump you on the army.

ROXO

Shall I let out it's strong or weak ?

CAZOTTI

Strong, but undermined by Socialism.

ROXO

But that's the truth !

CAZOTTI

As if he will believe it !

[*ROXO goes up to greet the Rolmenian Minister as he leaves the BARONESS.*]

OMAR

Her Excellency, the Countess Villop.

LIVIA [*As the COUNTESS enters*]

How good of you to come !

BARON GRIPSTEIN

Ah, Countess, there is no one whose presence in my humble home——

[*Cheering from outside penetrates even through the closed window*]

Ah, Her Majesty ! Excuse me ! Come, Livia.

LIVIA

There is plenty of time.

[*Turns to PRINCESS GONDAROFF, who has not left her*]

Yes, Princess, your *Bora* is not a nice wind. But in revenge your summers——

[*Louder cheering.*]

BARON GRIPSTEIN [*Glancing anxiously at RIFFONI*]

Livia! We shall be late.

[*Enter OMAR R.*]

OMAR

Her Majesty is arriving.

BARON GRIPSTEIN

I told you we should be late.

LIVIA [*Taking his arm and whispering*]

Compose yourself!

[*THEY go out, not without an uneasy backward glance of the BARON'S at RIFFONI, who is still in discussion with the DUKE, both oblivious of the watching MOLP. OMAR closes the door and disappears.*]

ESTER DA GRASSO [*Sotto voce to COUNTESS VILLOP*]

What manners! . . . And to think Livia sold herself to that Shylock's son! . . . Ah, there's poor old D'Azzollo!

[*Goes over to the window-seat and interrupts the discussion by a romantic call*]

Rinaldo!

DUKE D'AZOLLO [*Rising and bowing vaguely*]
Signora ! Neither of us is named Rinaldo.

ESTER DA GRASSO [*Piqued*]
You've forgotten Armida !

DUKE D'AZOLLO [*Puzzled*]
Armida ?

[*With exaggerated and mendacious romanticism*]
How could I forget Armida ?

ESTER DA GRASSO [*Drawing him away*]
They warned me you and Fiuma had no eyes now but
for the Queen.

DUKE D'AZOLLO
But I do remember you !
[*Sniffing her obviously strong scent*]
It's like a whiff of old times !

ESTER DA GRASSO
Ah, Rinaldo, those days on the yacht——

DUKE D'AZOLLO
You were on the yacht ?
[*Sniffs again*]
Ah, of course, I remember ! Little Ester—with the
opera-singers—— !

ESTER DA GRASSO [*Perceiving her husband is
coming up*]
Hush ! My husband !
80

DUKE D'AZOLLO

But he's deaf !

ESTER DA GRASSO

That was my previous husband.

DUKE D'AZOLLO

Santa Maria ! My memory !

ESTER DA GRASSO

When I was whisked into exile among our obstreperous peasants, I thought I'd go out of my mind. But I see I've gone out of yours.

[The door opens. A sudden hush falls on the company. Those who are sitting, rise. OMAR appears.]

CAZOTTI [*Quietly to RIFFONI*]

Get up ! And remember . . . !

RIFFONI [*Rising sullenly*]

For Salaret's sake.

OMAR

Her Exalted Majesty, the Queen.

[MARGHERITA enters, escorted by the BARON and BARONESS LIVIA, and accompanied by the MARQUIS FIUMA, whose manly beauty is enhanced by a chivalrous and devoted bearing, the COUNTESS CAZOTTI, a dyed and bediamonded beauty, desperately young, and a pretty Maid of Honour.

MARGHERITA, though in the prime of youth and

beauty, wears an air of noble sadness. HER costume is plain, with a pearl necklace, and she enters unassumingly, not breaking off her conversation. ALL bow or curtsy, except RIFFONI, who has folded his arms again. But the accidental grouping of the company, all clustering round the QUEEN and hanging on her lips, assists the wilful posture of MOLP to hide the rebel from the royal eyes.]

THE QUEEN [*Smilingly yet mechanically acknowledging the greetings*]

But you have a wonderful house, Baron. That quaint stone staircase from the courtyard !

BARON GRIPSTEIN

My Sigismondo says it dates from the Crusades, and that those Byzantine reliefs in the hall were inserted in the thirteenth century by the Duke of Dalmatia during his happily brief conquest of our country. I have had to cut his banqueting hall in twain—it was too large for our humble selves.

QUEEN

What a pity ! And how is dear Sigismondo ?

LIVIA

He felt his presence would damp our spirits—he begs Your Majesty to excuse him.

QUEEN

Oh, but that is morbid. Bring him down before I

go—don't forget. . . . Ah, there is my Rolmenian friend !

[SHE *extends her hand enthusiastically to the Rolmenian Minister, who kisses it*]

And how goes it with your beautiful country ?

ROLMENIAN MINISTER

Alas, Madam, our army is undermined by Socialism.

[CAZOTTI and ROXO *look at each other.*]

CAZOTTI [*Murmuring*]

Liar !

QUEEN

But I was just reading Prince Igmor's speech, congratulating the army on its morale.

ROLMENIAN MINISTER

That was for his royal father's consumption, Madam. Since His Majesty's last stroke we dare not tell him the truth.

QUEEN

I'm afraid it does not require strokes for sovereigns to be kept in the dark, eh, Cazotti ?

[*Offers her hand smilingly.*]

CAZOTTI [*Bowing to kiss it*]

Your Majesty's intuitions are only too illuminating.

COUNTESS CAZOTTI

But it's quite true, Alexis. You don't even tell *me* !
[*Laughter.*]

QUEEN [*Espying the PRINCESS*]

Ah, Princess, glad to see you in Valdania. How are things in Bosnavina?— But I forget, you come from Carlsbad. I hope you left your rheumatism there. That's where *you* ought to go, Marshal Roxo.

ROXO [*Kissing her hand*]

Ah, Madam, there is no cure for age and loneliness.

QUEEN

Poor Roxo! We are a pair.

ROXO

You, Madam, with your youth?

QUEEN

I am not so young as our friend, D'Azollo.

[*SHE turns to him and gives him her hand to kiss*]

The Duchess is not with you?

DUKE D'AZOLLO

If she were, would I look so young?

[*Laughter.*]

COUNTESS CAZOTTI

Oh, the monsters! This is what they say behind our backs.

[*Laughter.*]

DUKE D'AZOLLO

But it was a compliment to the Duchess! She asks me to convey her homage and regrets her headache is too bad.

QUEEN

Too bad indeed ! Since she resigned her Court duties, she has never come to see me. And I particularly wanted to see her to-night.

BARON GRIPSTEIN

She did hold out the hope of coming to the reception.
. . . Shall I telephone Your Majesty's wishes ?

QUEEN

Wouldn't her husband's telephoning have more influence ?

DUKE D'AZOLLO [*Laughingly*]

I shall 'phone her we are thirteen at table.

[*The BARON opens the door R. as if to conduct him*]
Don't trouble, Baron. I know where the telephone is.

LIVIA [*Smiling*]

And he complains of his memory !

[*The DUKE totters out and the BARON closes the door.*]

BARON GRIPSTEIN

I trust Your Majesty will not wait for the Duchess——

QUEEN [*Smiling*]

Your *chef* need not be alarmed. Seriously, my dear Baron, the absence of this guest is not so annoying as the presence of others.

BARON GRIPSTEIN [*Turning pale*]

But the list was submitted——

QUEEN

Those skeletons at the feast, I mean.

[Looks towards MOLP and RIFFONI, the latter of whom, gazing at her dumbly as if spell-bound, has finally attracted her attention]

You know how tired I am of seeing Molp, and now you have added a new protector, not even camouflaging him as a guest.

BARON GRIPSTEIN *[Miserably]*

I—I—believe me, Your Majesty, it was necessary.

QUEEN

In a private house? Though I was surprised to find my coming to you had leaked out, I encountered nothing but loyal demonstrations. True, in the Piazza da Pietra a woman sprang forward, and our brave Marquis turned pale. But she was only holding out a child to be touched against the evil eye.

CAZOTTI

There is always an evil eye on rulers, however popular.

BARON GRIPSTEIN

A man to whom a great treasure is entrusted cannot be too careful.

QUEEN

I appreciate your solicitude, but it spoils my appetite. Please send them away.

BARON GRIPSTEIN [*In agonised embarrassment*]
Certainly, Your Majesty. I had no idea of having them in the dining-room.

QUEEN
But I don't want them in the house at all.

BARON GRIPSTEIN
They shall not be.

QUEEN
But let them go at once.

BARON GRIPSTEIN
Of course. Colonel Molp, you heard Her Majesty's command.

[MOLP *hesitates, embarrassed.*]

QUEEN
Don't look so sullen, Molp. You know how much I appreciate your devotion. How is my little god-child ?

MOLP [*Brightening*]
Nina has cut another tooth, Your Majesty.

QUEEN
Dear little thing. It must be very difficult for you now your poor wife is dead.

MOLP
My mother has been with us : unfortunately, Your Majesty, she has had to go home to my aged father—a day distant.

QUEEN

Time *you* went home to say good-night to little Nina.

MOLP

Yes, Your Majesty.

[*To RIFFONI*]

After you, my friend.

[*RIFFONI does not move.*]

QUEEN

Why doesn't the man go ? Is he deaf ?

CAZOTTI [*Audaciously*]

I suppose he was selected so as not to overhear our conversation.

QUEEN

But he looks so intelligent—he ought to be doing higher work.

ROXO

What can be higher than protecting Your Majesty ?

BRIO [*Opening doors*]

His Majesty is served.

[*There is a fresh view of the rose-crowned table and the gorgeous lackeys.*]

BARON GRIPSTEIN

Ouf !

[*Wipes his brow*]

Your Majesty, may I have the distinguished honour . . . ?

[*The QUEEN takes his arm, the other guests pair off consulting their slips, the PRINCESS GONDAROFF with the ROLMENIAN MINISTER, the VISCOUNTESS PALESTRA with the PRINCE, the COUNTESS VILLOP with the MARQUIS FIUMA, the COUNTESS CAZOTTI with the VISCOUNT PALESTRA, SIGNORA DA GRASSO with CAZOTTI, and the MAID OF HONOUR with SIGNOR DA GRASSO.*]

COUNTESS CAZOTTI [*Pushing past the COUNTESS VILLOP*]

Excuse me—I think we go first.

[*The procession begins to move in, chattering and talking.*]

LIVIA [*To MARSHAL ROXO*]

Those telephone clerks! I'm afraid you'll have to give me the wrong arm.

[*SHE smilingly takes his left arm and brings up the rear. BRIO closes the folding doors behind her. Immediately through side-door R., as by secret instruction, MOLP's men pour in, while from door L., OMAR and footmen and gendarmes enter.*]

MOLP

Now, Signor !

RIFFONI [*Turning on him and the newcomers with all the fury of long-suppressed speech*]

Minions, lackeys, lickspittles! Legions that could

dictate to those gorging despots and that insolent minx——!

MOLP

Are you going quietly?

RIFFONI

More quietly than I shall return. By heaven and hell and all your sluggish saints, this society you grovel before shall feel my broom to the last cobweb!

A FOOTMAN [*Grinning*]

He's already been in the cellar.

[*Laughter.*]

RIFFONI [*To MOLP*]

Not speak? The day shall come when she shall beg for a word with me.

[*HE shakes his fist towards the folding doors*]

A rivederla, Margherita!

[*COLONEL MOLP steps towards him.*]

CURTAIN.

Act Two

[*A year later. The former throne-room in the old San Marco Palace at Scaletta, a vast oblong apartment, now turned into "The People's Hall." The throne, ornate and gilded, and blazoned with the arms of Valdania, a serpent encircling an eagle, still stands on the dais to the left, but the purple canopy has been removed, while a table, heaped with papers and placed in front of the throne, shows that the royal seat has been converted into a business chair, though a gong, a bell and a pistol on the table suggest that it is still no haven of security. Other seats, ranged beside the throne, suggest committees or tribunals. The captured flags which used to adorn the room are replaced by the Red Flag of Socialism and Labour banners, and instead of the busts of kings and the stone figures in the niches, there are busts of Karl Marx, Lassalle, Liebknecht, Rosa Luxemburg, etc. But there is no change in the mosaic floor, the rear wall barbaric with battle frescoes ("Alpastrum falling at Rome," etc.), the great fireless hearth in the centre of this wall, the narrow oak tables with their tall wax candles in great silver candlesticks. The two marble pillars still mark a sort of exit to the right, nor have the Oriental hangings veiling the entrance to the more private parts of the Palace been removed. In fact it is only in the right casement in the rear wall that there is a glaring change, for the beautiful old Madonna and child in stained glass has been replaced by a large plain glazed pane, which con-*

trasts sadly with the rich colours of the heraldic blazons of the old Valdanian provinces that still glow in the left casement. The worn stone steps leading to these casements give no indication that they are no longer trodden by the feet of sovereigns on their way to bow from the stone balcony. There is even no visible alteration in the line of guards that stands with fixed bayonets near the plain casement. They are still dressed in kilts with quaint feathered caps, and from their voluminous and brilliantly coloured silken sashes scimitars and yataghans still hang. The one-armed CORPORAL VANNI is still in command, though at the moment he is on the balcony absorbedly looking down on the Piazza da Pietra, disregarding the distant view of the lake and the snow peaks, though it can be enjoyed as communistically as ever. His men profit by his semi-absence and are chattering as the curtain rises.]

VANNI

Silence, pigs ! I can't hear Comrade Riffoni's farewell to the troops.

[*Silence falls*]

Too late ! They're off for the front.

[*Bugles sound, drums roll, marching and cantering is heard from the Piazza below. VANNI comes in, shutting the casement*]

The President isn't leaving too many for home defence.

MOLP [*Now among the Guards, but somewhat disguised by a great scar on his cheek*]

Nor too much in the larder.

VANNI

Peace, you White swine. You get more grub than our Dukes and Marquises in their skulking-holes. You're a counter-revolutionary, that's what you are, a lousy capitalist conspirator—strikes me I've seen your face over a white shirt—Melano, did you say your name was ?

MOLP

A white shirt doesn't make a White. All I want is to get to the front like those lucky beggars down there.

VANNI

All you want is to get two square meals a day.

[*Laughter of the GUARDS.*]

MOLP

More food would be welcome, I don't deny. But I was an officer before the Revolution and I——

VANNI

Officer or organ-grinder, we're all equal now and you're under me—don't you forget it !

MOLP

But I'm wasted here !

VANNI

Wasted ? Guarding the People's Hall ? You look out, Comrade, or my sister Fenella'll get her knife into you.

MOLP [*Wincing as at a memory, but recovering himself*]
Because I want to get *my* knife into the dirty Rolmenians ?

VANNI

There's dirtier than the Rolmenians. How about your old Roxo ?

MOLP

What about the Marshal ?

VANNI

He's joined the Rolmenians, haven't you heard ? Doesn't care a damn about us so long as he can restore the Queen to that chair there. I expect he'll guide Prince Igmor over our marshes. But they're no match for Riffoni, either of them, the saints be thanked.

MOLP

Not so certain. Riffoni after all is an amateur. Igmor has long led the Rolmenian forces and Roxo is a thundering tactician.

VANNI

Pooh ! Pooh ! The Marshal was never a patch on poor Marrobio. And now he's too shaky and rheumatic to cope with the President.

MOLP

But Igmor is young—and has already driven us out of Bosnavina.

VANNI

Hold your tongue, you pro-Rolmenian Royalist. You'll never see the Queen squatting here again—if she's alive at all!

[There is a stir to the right]

Attention!

[The rank stiffens in rigid awe. Enter between the pillars RIFFONI in a General's uniform. He looks considerably aged, with a set and anxious countenance. The GUARDS present arms. HE seats himself on the throne and examines papers for a moment amid the severe silence.]

RIFFONI *[Grasping a document]*

Comrade Vanni!

VANNI

Yes, my General.

RIFFONI

I see that Signor Orosobonetti, the editor of the *Sera*, was to be shot this morning. Has it been done?

VANNI

At dawn, my General.

RIFFONI

Good! The sun rose on one reactionary the less. How did he die?

VANNI

Crying "Long live Liberty!"

RIFFONI

Liberty—to destroy the Workers' Republic! Ah, these bourgeois with their egoistic ideals.

VANNI

And may we read the *Sera* now?

RIFFONI [*Smiting the table*]

Corpo di Bacco! Surely you know that its printing press still eludes us. If you are found with anything except the State organs, the *Red Worker* and the *International Republican*, you'll get very short shrift, my friend.

VANNI [*With chattering teeth*]

Yes, my General. I wasn't asking for myself—but I've got a White among my own men.

RIFFONI [*Spasmodically grasping the pistol*]

A Judas among my bodyguard!

VANNI

He even admires Roxo!

RIFFONI [*Springing up*]

Who is this whited sepulchre?

VANNI

He was only sent me this morning, but it didn't take me long to nose him out. Stand forward, Melano.

[*MOLP obeys and salutes.*]

MOLP

I'm neither White nor Red. I'm a soldier.

RIFFONI

Your name, Comrade.

MOLP

Melano.

RIFFONI

So I just heard. But I want your real name. . . .

[*A silence*]

Try to remember it !

MOLP

One can't forget one's name.

RIFFONI

I forgot mine when I sneaked back into Valdania.
Come, come—your face haunts me. . . . You know
we have instruments for making the dumb speak.
What were you before the Social Revolution ?

MOLP [*Hesitates*]

I told you—a soldier.

VANNI

An officer, he told me, and he wants to go to the front.

RIFFONI

An officer, were you ? What grade ?

MOLP

Colonel.

RIFFONI

Ah, Colonel *Molp* ! Of course, of course. That new scar of yours put me off. Then this time last year—
ha ! ha ! ha !

[*Relapses complacently on his throne*]

Where did you get that scar ?

MOLP

In the attack on this Palace.

RIFFONI

You mean in the defence—you defended the miserable Margherita.

MOLP

Could I desert her like Vanni ?

VANNI

Could I desert the rest of the army—especially when my sister Fenella—— ?

RIFFONI

Silence !

MOLP

It was that virago that jabbed my cheek when I was trying to save the Marquis Fiuma——

RIFFONI

Who had already contrived the Queen's escape, the devil take him.

MOLP [*Bowing his head*]

I hope he is with the angels. A gallant gentleman, who loved the Queen.

RIFFONI

Yes, I dare say you do too. Ah, she has you all in her net. She tried her tricks even on me, do you remember, though she thought I was only one of your men.

MOLP

She only said you ought to be doing better work.

RIFFONI [*Smiling*]

She doesn't lack intelligence, the minx.

MOLP

And I didn't lack courtesy. I treated you like a gentleman, though you treated me like a dog. When I escorted you across the frontier, I offered to share my sandwiches with you. Don't you remember?

RIFFONI

Perfectly. And though I refused your communistic offer, I said it was an augury of the future—do you remember that? Ah, you laughed then—you thought me done with. Despite all your gangs of spies and denouncers and *agents provocateurs*, you never tracked the underground railway by which I was to creep back when our propaganda had prepared the Revolution.

MOLP

It wasn't your propaganda—it was Rolmenia coming to liberate Bosnavina from our yoke.

RIFFONI

Ah, but why did Rolmenia dare the adventure ?

MOLP

Because Marrobio was no longer alive to frighten her.

RIFFONI

Marrobio's assassination was only a minor factor. Rolmenia's real motive was to keep down the Socialism in her army. She had to give it work and glory to divert it. As a result—mark the irony of fate—she exploded the Socialism in *our* army, which refused to go to the shambles to keep a sister-country in subjection.

MOLP

But it *is* going—you have just sent it off !

RIFFONI

In self-defence, not aggression. Rolmenia hasn't understood that our Republic was quite content to lose Bosnavina, that we should in any case have given back the freedom violated by our rapacious Queen. Drunk with success, the Rolmenians have dared to invade our own sacred soil.

MOLP

I know, curse them. That's why I want to go to the front.

RIFFONI [*Sardonically*]

I daresay. Anything sooner than the gallows, eh ?
So, Colonel Molp, you thought to treat me as the
Bosnavinian student treated Marrobio.

MOLP

By God, it is false !

RIFFONI

Obsolete oaths won't mend your case.

MOLP

But I was assigned here by the local Enrolment and
Distribution Committee appointed by the Industrial
Alliance under the Commissariat of Labour. In vain
I reminded them of the German proverb not to use
the piano for firewood. They pointed out it was a
rise on my last job.

RIFFONI

What was that ?

MOLP [*In a low shamed voice*]

Cleaning out slaughter-houses and latrines—it was
when the typhus was raging.

RIFFONI

You explained to them you were *Colonel* Molp ?

MOLP

Yes—er—that is, Colonel Melano.

RIFFONI

Why did you take a false name if not for false purposes? So many old officers applied for jobs under my Government and have found good ones too.

MOLP

Yes, but none had had my unpleasant relation with you. I was afraid of your vengeance—rightly so, as it has proved.

RIFFONI [*Bridling*]

How proved? You're not hanged yet, and if you are, it will be not by me but the Counter-Revolutionary Commission. . . . If you were so frightened of me, why didn't you flee the country?

MOLP

I had my little girl—I couldn't leave her.

RIFFONI

And yet you want to go to the front!

[*Laughter of the GUARDS.*]

VANNI

That little girl is a whopper.

[*Laughter of the GUARDS.*]

RIFFONI

Silence, Comrades! I know there *was* a little girl. Called Nina, wasn't she?

MOLP

You know her name?

RIFFONI

Aha ! . . . She is dead now, I suppose.

MOLP [*With a convulsive start*]

God forbid ! She's with her grandmother in the country.

RIFFONI

So you *could* part with her.

MOLP

Because there is corn and milk in the village—it is so far from towns.

RIFFONI

That is no answer. Town children are fed equally, however we grown-ups may go short.

MOLP

But I assure you——

RIFFONI

It is Salaret's proudest achievement. Ah, Colonel, it was when I saw *his* children starving under the pitiless economic process that I vowed no child in our State should ever go hungry or acold.

MOLP

But Nina——

RIFFONI

Fed, warmed, educated, entertained, cherished as never before in human history, our children show such

rosy faces that one might say the Red Flag rides triumphant in their cheeks.

MOLP [*Grimly*]

My Nina was white with hunger.

RIFFONI [*Agitated*]

Puns are out of place, Colonel. . . . Vanni, did you ever hear of children starving ?

VANNI

I did hear something once, but as the gallows took the grumbler, I thought it was just White propaganda.

RIFFONI

The gallows shall take the Children's Committee, if this prove true, Colonel Molp. Fortunately Salaret will be back from his provincial tour this very morning—he shall at once investigate your Nina's case. But to come back to my question, you say you couldn't bear to leave her, yet you want to go to the front—whence you may never come back to her.

MOLP [*Struggling with his emotion*]

God help me ! But can I see our country overrun by Rolmenians ?

RIFFONI

They won't get far, I assure you. Why not stay here and go on with your old job ?

MOLP [*Dazed*]

Go on with my old job ?

RIFFONI [*Smiling*]

With me substituted for Margherita of course. . . .
You said you were not a White but a soldier. Your
job with the Queen has lapsed. You don't feel bound
to her any longer, I assume.

MOLP [*Slowly*]

No, I suppose I don't.

RIFFONI

Then take over *my* protection. I work in this room
because thus I have under my eye the Piazza, which is
the natural focus of revolution, and I sit in this chair
because so I cannot well be stabbed in the back. But
assassination hangs over it as that old sword of
Alpastroom used to do. And why? Because I have
made it for the first time the throne of justice. . . .
Come, why do you hesitate?

MOLP

I don't see how Nina could have got here without a
God.

RIFFONI

What can you mean? What has that to do with it?

MOLP

The officers who took Government service told me
they had to profess atheism.

RIFFONI

Humph! . . . But we can consider this a private
post, not Government service.

MOLP

It is a heavy responsibility. I should have to take preventive measures——

RIFFONI

Who objects to that ?

MOLP

You did, in the case of the Queen. You see they involve spies, even *agents provocateurs*——

RIFFONI

The Queen's life concerned only herself. Mine concerns the new social order. It is *that* they wish to assassinate—we cannot be squeamish with assassins. No, no, you do exactly as before. So that's settled. . . .

[*Begins writing*]

And whatever your salary was——

MOLP

Then you do permit differences of income ?

RIFFONI

It is not strict Socialism, I know. But Salaret condones transitional measures.

[*Gives him the paper he has written*]

There, Comrade Molp ! Present this at the State Workers' Bureau, Section 17B, and they will give you a Colonel's uniform. And come back at noon to lunch with me—share my sandwiches !

MOLP

Thank you, my General—Comrade !

RIFFONI

And bring back little Nina to share yours.

MOLP [*Going*]

God bless you !

RIFFONI

Tut ! Tut ! If I permit you your superstition, do not obtrude it.

[*A confused clamour penetrates from the Piazza*]

What is that ? Stop, Molp ! You may have to begin your new functions at once. See what's going on.

[*MOLP opens the casement near the pillars and steps out to survey the Piazza. The clamour clarifies itself into cheers. HE comes in, closing the window.*]

MOLP

It is Salaret coming back.

RIFFONI [*Relieved*]

Bravo !

MOLP

A man was throwing a bouquet into the car.

RIFFONI

Ah, we are still popular. *Viva Salaret.* Shout, Comrades !

GUARDS

Viva Salaret ! Evoè Salaret !

[*MOLP goes out between the pillars with a military salute which only RIFFONI returns.*]

RIFFONI

Why didn't you salute him ? He is your officer now.

VANNI

A thousand apologies, my General.

RIFFONI

And don't forget to salute Comrade Salaret, though he is not a soldier.

VANNI

Do you hear, pigs—Comrades ?

RIFFONI

And remind me to speak to him about Comrade Molp's little girl.

VANNI

Yes, my General.

RIFFONI

I can't understand, Comrade, why you didn't report to me those rumours of hungry children. Are there any other grievances you know of ? Tell me, Comrade.

VANNI

Well, Comrade, it doesn't seem right I shouldn't get more rations than my men.

RIFFONI [*Winningly*]

But that *is* Communism, Comrade. Under the old system some people got too much and some too little.

VANNI

Now we all get too little.

RIFFONI [*Rather irritated*]

That's only temporary. Wait till Rolmenia gives us breathing-space to organize production.

VANNI

But if it's the dictation of the proletariat, why can't we dictate ourselves more rations all round ?

RIFFONI

That is silly.

VANNI

But my brother-in-law, the brooch-maker, says——

RIFFONI [*Sharply*]

The brooch-maker ! Does he still make brooches ?

VANNI [*Alarmed*]

With your head, my President.

RIFFONI

Let him look to his own ! Brooches indeed, when we want every possible hand for earth-labour, clothing or poison gas. How came the Enrolment and Distribution Committee to allow it ?

VANNI

He—he is Chairman of the Committee, my General.

RIFFONI

The Burial Committee will soon be busy with him.
[Writes.]

VANNI [*Panic-stricken*]

But my poor sister, Fenella——!

RIFFONI

Silence! The Republic has no use for slackers and shirkers. I expected you to ask for the privilege of arresting him.

VANNI [*Cringing*]

So I would if it wasn't for Fenella. He's a cocky little brute, is Stefano, and when he was made Chairman two chairs wouldn't hold him. But remember how Fenella that night—how she helped to make the Republic.

RIFFONI

Is that a reason her husband should help to destroy it?

[*Enter between the pillars PROFESSOR SALARET, carrying a bouquet. The GUARDS salute. SALARET is a prophetic-bearded, elderly figure, but looks tired and heavy-eyed beyond his years. RIFFONI springs up and hurries down the dais to salute him on both cheeks.*]

RIFFONI

Welcome home, Master. Even more welcome than your reassuring telegrams.

SALARET [*Returning his kisses*]
So glad to find you in Scaletta. I was afraid——

VANNI [*Imploringly*]
My General—— !

RIFFONI
Not another word. Every man who abuses his position must hang !

VANNI
But, Comrade, in the Bosnavinian war—— !

RIFFONI [*Handing him paper*]
Give Captain Lambri the order for his arrest, and withdraw. March !

[VANNI motions miserably to his men to file out with him]

Ah, Salaret, I cannot tell you what a comfort it has been amid all the chaos to learn that the peasantry was sound, that as far up the river as your yacht could penetrate, the new brotherhood was working blissfully.

SALARET
It is impossible to imagine more enthusiastic activity than I left behind me everywhere.

RIFFONI
Ah, Salaret, you are indeed fortunate. To how few pioneers is it given to see their vision translated into life ! Surely you disprove the Roman proverb : Call no man happy till he is dead.

SALARET [*Tugging at his beard*]

Humph! You realise, of course, that what enraptures them is the possession of the land. While some had seized it in advance, others did not even understand it was to be theirs for nothing—they offered me money to transmit to their refugee masters.

RIFFONI

Poor simple souls. But I hope you made it clear that it really belongs to the State and that it was to be worked in common.

SALARET

I would not press that point overmuch now, Vittorio. One big step at a time. Get your factory-workers as contented as your land-workers and then we can move further.

RIFFONI

But the nationalisation of the industries obviously involves work in common. You can't give each man a machine!

SALARET

But you added to their discontent by denationalising what was already nationalised.

RIFFONI [*Fretfully*]

You mean religion. But we couldn't compromise in *everything*. How can a modern State be built on these grotesque beliefs?

SALARET

But was there any need to turn half the churches into cinemas ?

RIFFONI [*Smiling*]

I doubled their congregations. The Entertainment Committee needed them to instil Socialism—the one true religion. Besides, you, yourself, transferred their ikons and Church plate to your Exchequer.

SALARET

The Church treasure couldn't be left in the cinemas.

RIFFONI

Don't let us argue to-day, dear Salaret. You must be tired. Sit down.

[*Drawing him towards the throne.*]

SALARET

No, no. Not there !

RIFFONI

It is there you should have been from the first.

SALARET

I know my place better. I am—our conversation has proved it once again—a mere curb on your creative vehemence. As Finance Minister I dock your schemes, as Commissary of the Interior I mutilate them to correspond with the possible.

RIFFONI

But it was your books that inspired everything !

SALARET

Was it I that lit the spark that glorious night ? No, no. To hold the masses, to breathe fire into the army, to repress revolution—that needs you. Ah, trust the people to know its true leader.

[Presses him into the throne, places the bouquet on the table, and sits beside him]

Why do you smile ?

RIFFONI

Not at your exaggerations. I was remembering how I told the Duke D'Azollo I would come back on his steam-yacht, with the Red Flag flying. And if I didn't fulfil my prophecy literally, my sending you on the yacht to supervise land-distribution came very near. You really found it better than your limousine ?

SALARET

Incomparably. You see one wasn't dependent on wretched country hotels or village inns—one had a floating home.

RIFFONI

I never thought of that. . . . Ah, if the Duke had only employed it like you, instead of making it a floating harem.

SALARET *[Hastily changing the conversation]*

I even ensured the draining of the marshes by distributing them too.

RIFFONI

Good ! We sorely need more home-grown food.

SALARET

Oh, the marshes can merely make pasture-land.

RIFFONI

That's something. If only these cursed militarists had conquered their own country !

SALARET [*With a grim smile*]

Isn't that what Roxo is trying to do now ? Your radio announcing the bad news quite spoilt my home-coming. Indeed, I fully expected to find you away at the front. You are not alarmed ?

RIFFONI

On the contrary. Igmor's invasion has stopped the factory strikes and pulled the country together—it may be the saving of the Workers' Republic.

SALARET

How splendid ! But all the same Prince Igmor——

RIFFONI

Trust General Hussein. He may not be as dashing as poor Marrobio, but he's wilier.

SALARET

You comfort me. But fancy Roxo going over to the enemy !

RIFFONI

I heard him once ask what could be higher than protecting the Queen. The old fanatic probably

imagines that once Margherita was restored, Prince Igmor would trot home like a lamb. But of course he would simply annex us.

SALARET

According to Armida——

[Tugs at his beard in confusion]

I mean, they say it is Margherita that Igmor really wants to annex—but perhaps that is all gossip.

RIFFONI *[Rising, agitated]*

It's all true—I found it in the archives. And she was ready to prostitute herself to that pig-eyed princeling, if only he would help her to conquer Bosnavina.

[Grimly]

But Igmor will neither annex Margherita nor Val-dania. He will be lucky even to get home.

SALARET

You seem very sure.

RIFFONI *[Laying his hand on Salaret's shoulder]*

Be proud of your son, Salaret. The experiments have succeeded at last.

SALARET

Guido's aerial torpedoes ?

RIFFONI

Kites we now call them for short. Yes, charged with his new poison gas, they annihilate in their descent all life—for at least a square kilometre.

SALARET
How horrible !

RIFFONI
Not so horrible as the annihilation of the Workers' Republic—the spiritual hope of the world. It was to organise this last line of defence that I flew back here yesterday—unfortunately the Kites are ponderous and we lack transport to convey them to the front. Igmor must come here if he wants to be wiped out. . . . Would I could wipe out our deficit as easily !

SALARET
The Church treasure was a great disappointment. The jewels in the ikons had already been stolen by the priests.

RIFFONI
I know. I am not criticising your balance-sheet. But if only Gripstein had not been so obstinately Royalist—by the way, thanks to the patriotic wave caused by the Rolmenian advance, he was betrayed into our hands yesterday.

SALARET
Bravo ! Then can't you convert him ?

RIFFONI
To Socialism ? More easily to Judaism !

SALARET [*Smoothing his beard*]
Ha ! ha ! ha !

RIFFONI

He won't even give away the hiding place of the Queen, or of the printing-press of the *Sera*, though I am sure he knows both. Apropos, Oroskobonetti was shot this morning.

SALARET [*Starting up*]

My dear Vittorio ! Not so many executions.

RIFFONI

He was more dangerous to the Republic than Prince Igmor.

SALARET

But I thought you had stopped his paper.

RIFFONI

It still appears—in the most unexpected places. Exploiting our every error and drawback. Wittily—I trace the Duke's pen. Ah, there is the latest copy.

[*Picks it up from litter on table.*]

SALARET [*Taking it*]

"Shorter Working Hours Demanded—An Eight Hour Day for the Hangman." There ! Just what I was saying. The first moment I came in, you were talking of hanging somebody. Armida—er—a lady told me you've been nicknamed "Riffoni the Red."

RIFFONI

Of course I'm a Red. But do you know what they call you ? "Salaret the Soft !" Alliteration always

pleases the people. But you won't get far with softness, believe me, dear Master. We tried that years enough, you and I. We wore out our quills and our throats. Ah, it is unimaginable how greedy, lazy and ungrateful men are, how cunning and evasive. Three times have I closed and sealed up the old markets, yet illicit buying and selling continues, and thieves and speculators plunge their dirty paws into the State stores. In vain I raid the houses in the middle of the night to search for army necessities, my very detectives spirit them away. I tell you, Salaret, terror is the only shaping-tool. The Earthly Paradise we plan must be cleared of weeds: pitilessly—for pity's own sake.

VANNI [*Reappearing timidly between the pillars*]
My General, you asked me——

RIFFONI

I asked you to give Captain Lambri the order for his arrest.

VANNI

But the little Nina——!

RIFFONI

Oh, that!

[VANNI salutes and begins to retire]

There's a case in point. Children unfed by some mismanagement or misappropriation. You must look into it. . . . Wait a moment, Corporal. Fetch me Comrade Gripstein.

VANNI

Yes, my General.

RIFFONI

And on second thoughts collect Comrade Livia, too. . . . No, let one of your men get the lady—we don't want the two prisoners consulting.

VANNI

I understand, Comrade.

[*Exit.*]

SALARET

What are you going to do ?

RIFFONI

Try my shaping-tool.

SALARET

More terrorism ?

RIFFONI

The Baron must be frightened into confessing where he has concealed his gold reserve. And his daughter-in-law, who was a maid of honour, surely knows where the Queen is burrowing.

SALARET

Why not let lost monarchs lie ?

RIFFONI

As long as she lives, she will be the storm-centre of reaction. You yourself said her beauty was the real

cause of Igmor's invading us. Even the currency you have failed to stamp out is infectious. Every coin with her image is a counter-revolutionary.

[*Produces one*]

Look at the hussy! She will always have a train of young monarchists all in love with her.

SALARET

Bah! *Gazotti* uncaught is more formidable.

RIFFONI

More sinister and spidery, but not more dangerous—unless you mean he has his wife's death to revenge.

SALARET

To revenge?

[*Laughs mirthlessly*]

From all I hear the shot that killed the Countess removed the one clog on his career. The woman simply dragged him down.

RIFFONI

All women drag one down.

SALARET

You haven't much experience.

RIFFONI

I had my youthful plunge—thanks to too much pocket-money. Ah, how good it was to come up to

the surface and breathe the clean sweet air of service !
It was your books dragged me up from the slime.

SALARET [*With uneasy facetiousness*]

And yet people call them dry. Odd that your father's books bored you then. But it's a wise child that knows his own father.

[*Moves towards the curtains*]

I suppose my old rooms——

RIFFONI

Yes, the Queen's suite is still at your disposal—I stick to my camp-bed in the basement. But you will surely wait to tackle Gripstein ?

SALARET

No, thanks. I don't like experiments in terror.

RIFFONI

But as Finance Minister you are peculiarly interested.

SALARET [*Drawing aside curtains and revealing OMAR on duty with a pistol in his girdle*]

I would rather have a wash. . . . Well, Omar, how are you ?

OMAR [*Salaams*]

Great is the mercy of Allah.

[*HE closes the curtains behind himself and SALARET. Enter through the pillars BARON GRIPSTEIN followed by CORPORAL VANNI. The BARON looks wistful, unkempt, unbrushed and woe-begone.*]

RIFFONI

Ah, Comrade Gripstein, good-morning.

[BARON *does not reply*]

So you are still tongue-tied ?

BARON GRIPSTEIN

I have nothing to say.

RIFFONI

And if we try some of those quaint instruments we unearthed in the vault—the prickly hare, the mouth-widener—— ?

BARON GRIPSTEIN

You will not.

RIFFONI

And why not, pray ?

BARON GRIPSTEIN

You founded a Society for the Prevention of Cruelty——

RIFFONI

Surgery is not cruelty. An operation for dumbness——

BARON GRIPSTEIN

Must be done under chloroform.

RIFFONI

Bah ! Your fencing will not save you. . . . Nor your daughter-in-law, either.

[LIVIA, *as he speaks, is brought in through the*

curtains, pale, but in better fettle. SHE smiles at the BARON and they look lovingly at each other]
Give Comrade Livia a chair.

LIVIA

I would rather stand.

RIFFONI

As you please. Don't imagine your disdain impresses me, any more than it did in your own salon. Why you should be so proud of never having earned your clothes and keep, your God alone knows. And you weren't too proud to blend your blood with the breed of Shylock! . . .

[LIVIA *winces*]

Come now, my patience is at an end. Where is the Queen?

LIVIA

Why not consult the *Sera*?

RIFFONI

You are adding insolence to your iniquities. Where is the Queen?

LIVIA

With the Duke and Duchess D'Azzolo.

RIFFONI

Yes, and the Duke and Duchess with the Queen. Do not try me too far.

[*Turns again to GRIPSTEIN*]

Where is your bank bullion?

BARON GRIPSTEIN

A Socialist State does not need gold.

RIFFONI

It must pay for its imports.

BARON GRIPSTEIN

And thus foster Capitalism abroad ?

RIFFONI

It is not our fault if Socialism is not everywhere simultaneous.

BARON GRIPSTEIN

And since it can never be simultaneous it can never *be*.

RIFFONI

The sunrise is not simultaneous but the world rolls always towards it. Where is your gold, I say ? . . . Ah, the old British King would have taken out your teeth.

BARON GRIPSTEIN

You will find only a little gold there.

LIVIA

Ha ! ha ! ha !

RIFFONI

Silence, woman. And you, Jew, understand that by the law of Valdania all bank-assets must be nationalised.

BARON GRIPSTEIN

So must all raw stuffs : yet to keep your factories going you yourselves buy secretly of speculators and profiteers.

RIFFONI

We are above the law : you are under it. What have you done with your bullion ?

BARON GRIPSTEIN [*Sullenly*]

Marshal Roxo has it.

RIFFONI

You traitor ! Then he has carried it to Rolmenia !

BARON GRIPSTEIN [*Jubilant*]

Has he ? Then Margherita will be restored !

RIFFONI [*Grimly*]

You shall not live to see it.

BARON GRIPSTEIN

I died when Sigismondo died. Ah, the poor blind boy could not see his murderers ! But God saw them ! I will repay, saith the Lord, I will repay.

RIFFONI

Ha ! ha ! ha ! Let Him first repay what He owes the old *régime*. Corporal Vanni !

VANNI

Yes, my General.

RIFFONI

String the Jew up at once.

BARON GRIPSTEIN [*Transformed from prophet to
poltroon*]

Not *hanged*! Creator of the Universe!

RIFFONI

What does it matter to one dead already?

LIVIA

You dare not hang a Knight of the Order of the Redeemer.

RIFFONI

And who will redeem him? He doesn't deserve a soldier's death. . . . Now, Corporal!

BARON GRIPSTEIN

But give me time—an hour—half an hour——!

RIFFONI

What do you need time for?

BARON GRIPSTEIN

For prayer—repentance—the confession of my sins.

RIFFONI

Surely a week wouldn't suffice for your sins against Labour. Give him ten minutes, Comrade, perhaps he will repent of his refusal to help the Republic.

BARON GRIPSTEIN

God bless you. But I need a Rabbi.

LIVIA [*Revolted*]

A Rabbi? You!

BARON GRIPSTEIN [*Frenzied*]

A Rabbi, for God's sake! I have trespassed——!

[*Begins to beat his breast and recite the Hebrew confession*]

Al chêt shechetanu lefanecha——

RIFFONI

Stop these mummeries. The State recognises no holy slackers. They have all accepted useful work under the Republic—the Patriarch, the Mufti, the Grand Rabbi. Only the Cardinal has so far managed to evade our Enrolment Committees—but we shall yet harness him.

LIVIA

The Church has survived worse persecutions.

RIFFONI

Persecutions? Who interferes with your performances? We won't pay for them, that's all. Apropos, since the Cardinal does no State work, let *him* be fetched to the Baron.

BARON GRIPSTEIN

No! No! Not a priest! A Rabbi!

RIFFONI

You queer pious people—one man's saviour is another

man's Satan ! Take him away ! . . . Wait ! Unless within the ten minutes he reveals the Queen's hiding-place, let his daughter-in-law dangle beside him.

LIVIA

Do not speak, father !

BARON GRIPSTEIN [*Huskily*]

You to be hanged !

LIVIA

What is death but stepping across a frontier—into the arms of Christ !

BARON GRIPSTEIN

Ah, if I could believe in Him !

LIVIA

You do—you must. Pray to the Sacred Heart and His Precious Blood. He will guide you to God.

BARON GRIPSTEIN [*Clutching at her hand*]

You must guide me—ah, I see only a black road.

LIVIA

Siglsmondo is waiting to lend you his eyes——

BARON GRIPSTEIN

Out of my first earnings, we moved into a tiny two-roomed house and there was gas. O the light and hope when it first blazed yellow from our match ! . . . And that it should all have come to this !

[*Covers his eyes. MOLP, now in a colonel's uniform, re-enters between the pillars.*]

RIFFONI

Ah, Colonel, the very man I wanted. . . . How nicely that fits you! . . . Your first job will, I hope, be as amusing to you as it is to me. You are to conduct these two undesirables across the frontier.

MOLP [*Surveying them*]

I see the joke.

BARON GRIPSTEIN [*Dazed*]

The frontier ?

RIFFONI

Not the one with Christ in the custom-house. . . . Nor, Colonel, the Bosnavinian frontier where they would only reinforce the other White refugees. Take my motor-car. And divide your sandwiches with them—ham, I hope.

BARON GRIPSTEIN

We are not to be hanged ? O God of Israel !

LIVIA

O Blessèd Mary !

RIFFONI

Settle between yourselves which has saved you. But I will tell you, Baron, *what* has saved you—the anonymous pension you paid Salaret !

BARON GRIPSTEIN

You know ?

RIFFONI [*Smiling*]

Haven't we got possession of all your papers of no value? Ah, the agony when friend Molp was escorting me out of Valdania—the thought that I was leaving Salaret and his little ones to starve. But those bank-notes the post brought him every first of the month—

[*His voice breaks down. HE extends his hand, which the BARON takes as in a dream*]

Addio. Don't counterplot too much.

BARON GRIPSTEIN [*Still dazed*]

How truly is it written that charity averts the evil decree!

RIFFONI

Look after him, Baroness, he's a good old soul, despite all his religions.

LIVIA

I should have been more grateful, Signor, had you played with us less cruelly.

RIFFONI

I am sorry that it was necessary in the State interest to try to extract the information. I have failed and there's an end of it. As a matter of fact, I haven't the power to send people to death without a trial. Find them Austrian passports, Molp, else the Baron will be refused admission as a Socialist. Ha! ha! ha!

MOLP

Then you won't expect me to lunch.

RIFFONI

Ha ! I'm sorry. But come as soon as they are safe and report——

[*Re-enter SALARET through the curtains*]

Ah, Salaret, just in time to say good-bye to your benefactor.

SALARET

He has disgorged the bullion ?

RIFFONI

No, no—I was referring to the banknotes he sent you every month.

SALARET

He ? But *you* sent them !

RIFFONI

I ? I could scarcely keep myself. Didn't I tell you I discovered they were his secret amends for having sacked you ?

SALARET

That was very kind of you, Baron. But I had rather you had given me back my editorship.

BARON GRIPSTEIN [*With a twinkle*]

You can have it back now, if you like.

RIFFONI

Ha ! ha ! ha ! The old chap has more humour than his God.

SALARET

But I accept your offer. Where is the printing-office ?

RIFFONI

Ha ! ha ! ha ! Well countered, Salaret ! Write him an order on the Treasury for his advances—with interest.

BARON GRIPSTEIN

No, not interest. Don't rob me of my good deed.

SALARET [*Writing*]

Very well.

BARON GRIPSTEIN

But you must double the principal.

SALARET

Eh ?

BARON GRIPSTEIN

The currency has halved its value since you became Finance Minister.

LIVIA

How can you chaffer so, Baron ? When we have just escaped death.

BARON GRIPSTEIN

That is why, *carissima*. We have to *live*. What with

Bosnavina repudiating her loan, even the fare to America would be a consideration.

[OMAR *comes through the curtains towards RIFFONI, bearing a letter on a salver.*]

LIVIA [*Shocked*]

You here, Omar !

OMAR [*Apologetically*]

I had to live, your Excellencies.

BARON GRIPSTEIN

Just what I was saying, Omar. And very glad to see you alive.

[RIFFONI *takes the letter and begins opening it.*]

SALARET [*Simultaneously handing GRIPSTEIN the order on the Treasury*]

There ! You can't say the Workers' Republic is as repudiatory as Bosnavina.

RIFFONI [*Looking up*]

You'd better lend him *your* car to the frontier, Salaret—it's more comfortable than mine. Unless he'd like my aeroplane.

BARON GRIPSTEIN [*Shuddering*]

God forbid !

[RIFFONI, *amused, begins to read the letter, and MOLP speaks to SALARET, evidently about the motor-car.*]

OMAR [*To GRIPSTEIN*]

Is Signor Brio alive, Effendi ?

BARON GRIPSTEIN

My majordomo ? . . . How should I know ?

OMAR [*Lowering his voice*]

And Her Majesty ?

[GRIPSTEIN *makes a warning gesture that MOLP is approaching.*]

MOLP

Are you ready, Baron ?

BARON GRIPSTEIN

Perfectly. Signor Riffoni, as you have been merciful, may you find mercy. *Addio.*

RIFFONI [*Absently, absorbed in the letter*]

A rivederla.

[MOLP *salutes equally unmarked and together with VANNI and the GUARD escorts the BARON and LIVIA out.* RIFFONI *gives a long low whistle.*]

SALARET

What is it, Vittorio ?

RIFFONI [*Joyously*]

The beginning of the end !

[HE *hands him the letter.* SALARET *tugs at his beard nervously.* RIFFONI'S *face falls at a sudden suspicion*]

But do you know if that is his handwriting ? It may be an assassin.

SALARET

It may be worse—it may be the man himself. . . .
What is the Signor like, Omar ?

OMAR

Very shabby, Effendi. Like a deserter. I marvel they let him cross to my side of the Palace. He must know his way about it.

RIFFONI

He would.

OMAR

They say Captain Lambri let him in because he saw him throw a bouquet into your car.

SALARET

The rogue ! But is he fat, thin, long, short ?

OMAR

Short and not so fat as last year.

RIFFONI

Ha ! Then you know him.

OMAR

No, Effendi. But his garments hang loose.

SALARET

Quite a Sherlock Holmes.

RIFFONI

Who sees everything except the central fact. You didn't recognise Cazotti ?

OMAR

The Prime Minister ! . . . The counter-revolutionist, I mean. But Count Cazotti's face was hairless and this man is bearded like a Medina pilgrim.

RIFFONI

Beards, unlike brains, can grow. Let him come. . . .

[Exit OMAR]

Ah, I nearly cried "Thank God !"—such is the force of early idioms. The Workers' Republic is safe ! Embrace me, Salaret.

SALARET [*Waving him off*]

Beware of Cazotti's embrace. The Republic safe, forsooth ! If you accept his offer to betray the Queen's hiding-place, you will have to amnesty him—he is even capable of demanding the reward for delivering himself up ! Once he has got his foot in again, he will renew communication with Roxo, and the traitor within will deliver the citadel to the traitor without.

RIFFONI

You overlook, dear Master, that once we capture the Queen, there will be no dynasty for Roxo to restore.

[CAZOTTI comes through the curtains which are parted by OMAR ; a broken refugee with a ragged iron-grey beard and whiskers]

So, Cazotti, the game's up !

CAZOTTI

Yes, King Capital is dead, long live the Workers' Republic !

RIFFONI [*Astonished*]

You're a Socialist now ?

CAZOTTI

I always was.

SALARET

What !!

CAZOTTI

Every statesman is, seeing that the State is only a Social group. Individualism is anarchy.

SALARET

Oh really ! Do you take us for innocents ?

CAZOTTI

Innocence and politics are incompatible. Your days of innocence are over, Signor Salaret.

SALARET [*Sharply*]

I don't understand you.

CAZOTTI

May I sit down ? I am tired.

[*HE finds a chair and sits looking round*]

The room seems to have lost colour ! Ah, you have removed the window-Madonna !

RIFFONI

She let in the air through a hundred bullet-holes.

CAZOTTI

Yes, and a bullet on my poor wife, who had such a foolish faith in her protection.

[Covers his eyes and is silent a space. Looks up fiercely]

Ah, I daresay you think I am posing at bereavement. My wife was often absurd, I know, but I can't forget that with a dozen rich aspirants for her hand, she married the struggling journalist when he hadn't a soldo.

[Covers his eyes again.]

SALARET *[Breaking the silence sardonically]*

So you always were a Socialist ?

CAZOTTI *[Animated again]*

What was the constitution I gave Valdania if not Socialist ?

SALARET

It was Democratic, not Socialist.

CAZOTTI

Your paper said the contrary.

SALARET *[Outraged]*

My paper ?

CAZOTTI

Practically. You said that now every man had a vote, Labour being the overwhelming majority had only to return a Workers' Parliament to ensure the dictation of the proletariat.

RIFFONI

That was true in theory but in practice the propertied classes would have resisted expropriation with the knife.

CAZOTTI

I quite agree *they* would have become the revolutionary party. Anyhow, you don't suppose it was tenderness for *them* that instigated my reforms? Did not the Duke D'Azollo complain I had commandeered his farm? The aristocratic party I overthrew used to fling at me that I had begun on a tub. In reality I began lower—on a doorstep. I am not only a son of the people, but a nameless son. Ah, it was not capital that rocked my cradle. Never have I lost the burning sympathy with my own class that springs from the sense of a wronged childhood.

RIFFONI

But you said in my own hearing that self-interest is the only practicable pivot of society—you quoted your dentist.

CAZOTTI [*Smiling*]

I thought you would throw that in my teeth.

[RIFFONI *smiles*]

He has now charge of yours by the way, and your every smile shows the world he was wrong and that happily human nature is better than we thought. You have proved that love of the State is sufficient to make the wheels go round—I can hear them humming all around me.

RIFFONI [*With satisfaction*]

Ha !

SALARET

A quick conversion.

CAZOTTI

And if I had not been converted, what would you have said ? That like the Bourbons I learn nothing and forget nothing. I overrated the power of resistance of the possessing classes. All wars in my experience have been economic at bottom. What then, I thought, would be the bloodiness of the war which is economic at top too ! Your colleague has just admitted he thought the propertied classes would have fought even constitutional expropriation to the death. Had I foreseen how feeble would be their defence, or even with what comparative apathy the workers would submit to docketing and regimentation, I would have gone forward more boldly. You accused me of moving in spirals. It is true. As a workaday politician I did not believe the popular intelligence sufficiently advanced to follow a straight lead. I had not your genius and courage for a frontal attack on the old order. But if I moved spirally, the spirals were

always upward, and now that I have made the last turn—here I am at your side !

RIFFONI [*Rather dazed*]

You offer co-operation as well as information ?

CAZOTTI

In any capacity, however humble.

SALARET

After you expelled him from Valdania ?

RIFFONI

Ah, I was forgetting. . . . And you, Comrade Cazotti, forget you are not now in the Chamber of Deputies. Here we demand Truth.

CAZOTTI

I expelled you from Valdania because I thought your frontal attacks would only stiffen the bourgeois against my spiral methods.

SALARET

But when we achieved your secret aim, why did you not join us at once, why lie low so long ?

CAZOTTI

Were you in the mood to have me, or rather were your ferocious followers, the Fenellas and Lambris ? I had to wait for the first ferment to be over.

SALARET

Or for the revolution to succeed.

RIFFONI

Or for the revolution to succeed. Then you throw us bouquets.

CAZOTTI

And do you call this success? Western Europe drawing daily further from you, and the Romenian army nearer? No, Comrades, what I offer to share is your risk, not your success. It is the ruin of my career if you are conquered.

RIFFONI

We shall not be conquered. At the worst our Kites——

SALARET

Sh! You are indiscreet. . . . And what help, Count Cazotti, can *you* bring us?

CAZOTTI

What help can *I* bring? Leaving out that I bring you the Queen, cannot you see that with my European reputation my accession to your ranks will show the world that opposition is futile, that you are here to stay?

RIFFONI

Ha!

CAZOTTI

While my personal relations with the various Cabinets will ensure the recognition of the Republic. I can pour oil on the troubled waters.

SALARET

Thank you—we can offer our own petroleum concessions.

RIFFONI

Ha ! ha ! ha !

CAZOTTI

The capitalist countries may deal with you, but they will not recognize you politically.

RIFFONI

Just what we want. What you call our Fenellas and Lambris would resent our recognizing *them*. You are sure that if we deal with them, we can rely on their not recognizing us officially ?

CAZOTTI [*Smiling*]

Even for that you need a practised diplomatist. And still more for the oil concessions will you need a practised Finance Minister.

SALARET [*Bounding*]

What !! . . . Vittorio, we must discuss this alone. . . . I insist.

[RIFFONI *strikes the gong on his table once.* VANNI *and his men file in.*]

RIFFONI

Remove Count Cazotti till I signal again.

[*They march him out.*]

CAZOTTI [*At exit*]

Like you, Comrade Riffoni, I shall return.

SALARET

O my guileless Vittorio, with all your genius! The scoundrel is playing on your nobility.

RIFFONI [*A little restive*]

Say gullibility and have done with it. Surely what he says is true—his accession will be the seal of our success. And he is devilishly able.

SALARET

Devilishly. A sinister spider, as you put it just before. Stamp upon him.

RIFFONI

And let the Queen escape?

SALARET

We shall find her without him.

RIFFONI

Not so sure.

SALARET

The new patriotic wave you tell me of will fling her at our feet, as it flung Gripstein.

RIFFONI

And in the meantime her damnable face is to hover in the air, obscuring our future.

SALARET

You exaggerate her importance.

RIFFONI

At any rate I cannot exaggerate Cazotti's. Surely the Interior is burden enough for you. Suppose you hand him over the Finances—he did do wonders with them.

SALARET

Under Gripstein's coaching. Even then look at the debt he left us.

RIFFONI

That was the Bosnavinian war. As you wittily said in the *Sera*, we died beyond our means.

SALARET

Yes, but who sent us to death? Cazotti.

RIFFONI

No, no, Margherita was the murderess. Margherita, with her craving to add Bosnavina to her dominions and Duchess to her title. Ah, Cazotti will more than atone for his past, if he really delivers her into our hands.

SALARET

Then let him deliver her—and let them die together!

RIFFONI [*Surprised and shocked*]

Salaret! How could we act so dishonourably? We promised amnesty to any informant——

SALARET [*Tugging at his beard*]
Did we ? Then Cazotti's information must be refused.

RIFFONI
Why ? Amnesty does not imply accepting him as a colleague, nor even perhaps keeping him in the country—I could deport him. That would complete the turning of the tables. Ha ! ha ! ha ! But we *must* have the Queen !

SALARET
Vittorio, I beseech you.

RIFFONI [*Touched*]
A Salaret does not beseech. Let the dog go !
[*Strikes gong.*]

SALARET
Unchanged ?

RIFFONI
You said not so many hangings.

SALARET
One hanging may save many.

RIFFONI
We can always catch him again—the brute is sadly winded.

[*Already CAZOTTI is returning with VANNI and the GUARDS, who range themselves against the wall.*
RIFFONI *seats himself on the throne*]

Count Cazotti, Comrade Salaret and I have considered both your offer of information and your offer of co-operation, and in both cases——

[*Enter OMAR through the curtains*]

I didn't ring.

OMAR

No, Effendi, but the Commissary of Police is telephoning——

RIFFONI

Komak ? Can't you take the message ?

OMAR

He says it is too great for any ear but the President's.

RIFFONI

I shall really have to instal the receiver here. And then farewell even to the dregs of peace. Salaret, will you convey our decision to Count Cazotti ?

SALARET

With pleasure. And give Komak my greetings. He was my boy's college-chum and subsidizer, you remember ! A splendid fellow !

[*RIFFONI follows OMAR out. SALARET seats himself on the dais, but not on the throne*]

Count Cazotti, we have come to the conclusion that since leopards do not change their spots——

CAZOTTI [*Coolly*]

Hadn't you and I likewise better discuss this alone ?

SALARET

There is nothing to discuss. And if there was, do you suppose I would trust myself within reach of the leopard's paw ?

CAZOTTI

Very well. Do not blame me if my revelations before the proletariat——

[*Their eyes meet.*]

SALARET

Corporal Vanni, search this man for weapons.

VANNI

Yes, Excel—— Comrade !

[*Taps CAZOTTI everywhere with his one arm*]

Aha !

[*Bounding back*]

A hand-grenade ! . . . No, no, my friend, I'm not going to lose my other arm.

CAZOTTI [*Producing and re-pocketing it*]

It is an apple . . . I have had to eat as I could.

SALARET

Ah, like me when I lost my editorship. . . . Comrade Vanni, withdraw your men, but if I sound the gong——

VANNI

The President strikes twice when he wants us to *rush*. And there is his pistol on the table.

SALARET

Ah !

[*Seizes it as the GUARDS turn and go.*]

CAZOTTI

Put it down—you are such a bad shot, you might really hit me. A pity you had no pre-revolution experience, like your aviating chief. See ! I retire to this pillar—whence Marrobio once addressed the Queen. Now you can listen calmly.

SALARET

I shall not listen long.

CAZOTTI

There is no need. One word of yours sufficed to show me how the land lay.

SALARET [*Puzzled*]

What ?

CAZOTTI

Precisely. The little word “What.” When I mentioned the finances. You were not anxious I should take them over.

SALARET

Why should I be ?

CAZOTTI [*Blandly*]

I know I’m not such a *chartered* accountant as you are.

SALARET [*Fiercely*]

What are you hinting at ?

CAZOTTI

Only the expense of carrying on your yacht's ducal tradition.

SALARET

Ducal tradition ?

CAZOTTI

Come, come ! You had your underground news-service before the revolution—we have it after.

SALARET

We ?

[*Strikes gong twice*]

I told Riffoni you were dangerous.

[*VANNI and the GUARDS dash in.*]

CAZOTTI [*Coolly*]

And I once told him you were not.

SALARET [*Waving VANNI back*]

I was only testing your vigilance. Thank you.

[*The GUARDS retire*]

So you admit you are here for treachery to the Republic.

CAZOTTI

And what name do you give to seducing the Republic's lady prisoners ?

SALARET

What do you say ?

CAZOTTI

I can speak louder if you like.

SALARET

No, no, I hear quite well—at least come a little closer.

CAZOTTI [*Coming almost up to him, sardonically*]

You see, how you are losing your alarm.

SALARET

Your news-service is false. There are no women on the yacht. Riffoni will never believe you.

CAZOTTI

You may have smuggled them into safety—you could hardly do less after your marine revelries. But when I call for the prison-records of the counter-revolutionaries and ask where are such and such highborn ladies, awaiting trial or execution—well, if I rightly understand the evolution of your Riffoni, that dynamic visionary, that ascetic assassin——

SALARET

He wasn't always such a saint. What good would it have done to shoot all those beautiful women ?

CAZOTTI

Oh, don't suppose I utterly condemn you. You had a hard plodding youth, and a big dull family that you

couldn't always feed, and suddenly you find yourself riding on the rainbow and commanding the eclipse. You couldn't stand it, my friend, any more than those highborn ladies could stand hunger and cold and the fear of death. I couldn't stand these things myself. That's why I'm coming into your Government.

SALARET

You seriously insist—— ?

CAZOTTI

Government has become a habit with me—call it a vice. Without power I feel like the opium-eater without his drug.

SALARET

No ! No ! You shall not come in to betray Riffoni. Rather will I tell him everything. After all there's only one woman now, and I'm ready, nay anxious, to marry her.

CAZOTTI

It takes three to make a marriage and Signor da Grasso is still alive. But who says I come in to betray Riffoni ? I come in to escape eating apples and creeping about like a hunted cat. There used to be flags and red carpets when I arrived at a town, every street grew full of pointing fingers, the place, however important, became a mere background for my personality. Now a pointing finger would be an arrow at my heart. It is not pleasant.

SALARET

I could smuggle you out of the country on the yacht—with a countess or two, if you like.

CAZOTTI

I don't. This is my year of mourning for my wife.

SALARET

You are a strange man.

CAZOTTI

I want my drug !

SALARET

Join Roxo—the Rolmenians will give you plenty of power.

CAZOTTI

Ah, but I want this new and concentrated form of it—decrees, ukases, rules, regulations, registrations, restrictions, prescriptions, perquisitions, inquisitions, raids, confiscations, censorship, compulsory labour, dictation at the bayonet's point, without public meeting without newspapers, without parliaments—ye good what a flavour ! How does it taste, Comrade, how does it taste ?

SALARET

You exaggerate our autocracy as you caricature its object. If we take power, it is for social construction. You would take it as a drug.

CAZOTTI [*Chuckling*]
But not as an aphrodisiac.

SALARET

Damn you for a devil !

[*Re-enter RIFFONI through the curtains.*]

RIFFONI

A devil indeed ! When he offered to betray the Queen he knew she was already in our hands.

SALARET

We have the Queen ?

RIFFONI

And the Duke D'Azollo ! And the printers of the *Sera* ! As I suspected, the gang clung together. And Komak nearly got this rascal too, who was on a visit to the house, only he cunningly passed himself off as President of the House Committee.

SALARET

The Queen has been in Scaletta all along ?

RIFFONI

In the very heart. In an upper apartment belonging to Brio's mother. The printing-press was in the loft. Ah, Salaret, this is a great moment—second only to that when we first stood here—you and I—in a Palace purified of Queen and Court. Embrace me again, dear Master.

[*THEY kiss each other*]

Ah, how they melt away, all the obstacles to your noble purpose! It is the compensation of your long joyless years. . . .

[CAZOTTI *has turned pale, but with arms folded strives to meet SALARET'S averted eye. HE now lets a little snigger escape him. RIFFONI turns on him*]

As for this dog, he said he began on a doorstep, let him end high on the gallows. The Tribunal must sit at once. Where is Vanni?

[*Picks up his gong-stick.*]

SALARET [*Clutching the gong-stick*]

But, Vittorio, you said it was dishonourable to hang him.

RIFFONI [*Pulling his stick back*]

Only if we had accepted his information. . . . Ah, Salaret the Soft, when it comes to the point you can't bear even a spider stamped on. You will next be pleading for the Queen.

SALARET

The Queen is an encumbrance: Cazotti, you urged, may be an asset.

RIFFONI [*Dazed*]

But it was you who—why I just heard you call him a devil!

CAZOTTI

Because I mocked at your amateur Socialism. If I couldn't make a better State than that, well, I shouldn't wait for *you* to hang me.

RIFFONI

We know it is rough and ready.

CAZOTTI

Rough because *you* were not ready. Believe me, I studied the Professor's books and bought your paper regularly, but never did I see any imaginative grasp of the new order, or the new evils that would arise in place of the old, as the dint in an india-rubber ball varies its place as you try to squeeze it away. You foresaw nothing, prepared nothing.

RIFFONI

We cross our bridges when we come to them.

CAZOTTI

And they break down under you. And your boats you had already burnt.

RIFFONI

When Michael Angelo was asked how it was possible to paint frescoes on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, he replied the work itself would teach the method. We live from day to day.

CAZOTTI

And from hand to mouth apparently. Communism forsooth! You had to offer money even for my arrest—enriching some individual!

RIFFONI

It's not so easy to abolish money.

CAZOTTI

No—it remains the root of all evil. Well, I congratulate the anti-Socialists. Your State is a splendid advertisement for them.

RIFFONI [*Piqued*]

What would *you* do ?

CAZOTTI

When the physician is called in, he will prescribe.

SALARET

Do call him in, Riffoni—his very mockery convinced me of his sincerity.

RIFFONI [*Dazed*]

You are convinced of his sincerity ?

SALARET

Absolutely.

RIFFONI

Then convince me of yours—give him over the Finances.

SALARET

With enthusiasm.

RIFFONI [*Taken aback*]

Although you know he was with the Queen this very morning ?

CAZOTTI [*Glibly*]

I went to inform her of my change of views—to counsel her to quit Valdania.

SALARET

That was only fair.

RIFFONI [*Slowly*]

Well, Comrade Cazotti, this is a strange turn in the situation. *Would* you undertake the Finances?

[SALARET *looks at CAZOTTI wistfully.*]

CAZOTTI

The problems of the Interior tempt me more.

SALARET [*In grateful admiration*]

Just as you please. . . .

[*Holds out his hand, which CAZOTTI grasps. Enter OMAR bearing a luncheon tray with three covers and a bottle of champagne, supplementing the water-bottle.*]

RIFFONI

How the morning flies!

[*To CAZOTTI*]

You will join our repast?

CAZOTTI

With the greatest hunger.

RIFFONI [*Smiling*]

Luckily you come in for Colonel Molp's rations. He had to go off.

CAZOTTI

Colonel Molp ? He has seen the light too ? Bravo !

RIFFONI [*With sudden rage to OMAR*]

Why have you brought champagne ?

OMAR

Signor Salaret's orders, Effendi.

SALARET

To celebrate my return. Why let the royal wine spoil in the cellars ?

RIFFONI

We agreed it was to be used in the hospitals.

SALARET

That only resulted, I found, in the hospital staff getting drunk.

CAZOTTI [*Laughingly*]

Didn't I say the problems of the Interior were tempting ?

RIFFONI

This is no laughing matter. I see we must prohibit alcohol altogether.

CAZOTTI

But not on the day of the Queen's capture ! I do hope it's the special vintage presented to her by the King of Rolmenia—just before he declared war.

SALARET

We ought to have sent *you* to the cellar.

CAZOTTI

I was expecting to be sent lower still. And the dungeon is deplorably out of repair. Ugh !

SALARET

Trust Omar to choose a good wine—wasn't he with Gripstein ?

[OMAR *has meantime opened the bottle and poured out two glasses, but RIFFONI stops him at the third, which he fills himself from the water-bottle and raises in a toast.*]

RIFFONI

To our Triumvirate !

CAZOTTI [*Clinking a champagne glass with RIFFONI's*]
And the Workers' Republic !

SALARET [*Clinking both glasses*]

To the Workers' Republic !

[THEY *drink. A confused sound of cavalry and shouting from the Piazza. RIFFONI drops his glass, which breaks.*]

RIFFONI [*Rushing towards the casement*]

Ah, at last !

CAZOTTI [*Amazed*]

You haven't had the Queen brought *here* ?

RIFFONI
Where else ?

CAZOTTI
The Fort Prison, of course.

RIFFONI
Right away on the lake ? No, no. After the long strain of awaiting her capture, I must have her under my own eye.

CAZOTTI
But where will you put her ?

RIFFONI
There is a dungeon.

CAZOTTI
Madness ! I beg your pardon, but prisoners are my department. You don't want the anti-Socialists to go on congratulating themselves. Who has her old suite ?

RIFFONI
Salaret.

CAZOTTI
Salaret ? What is he doing in a woman's apartment ?

[*Hurries through the curtains.*]

SALARET
Oh, Vittorio ! Suppose he should connive at her escape.

RIFFONI [*Impatiently*]

You veer round like a child's toy.

[*HE throws open the casement, revealing the lake and the snow mountains*]

Listen !

[*From the Piazza mounts a loud booing, through which penetrate cries of "Down with Margherita," "Death to Margherita." A voluptuously vindictive smile slowly illumines his ascetic features as the curtain falls.*]

Act Three

[*The same, the next morning. COLONEL MOLP stands showing OMAR a photograph.*]

MOLP

Intelligent? She's wonderful! Why, her grandmother writes——

[*Pauses to press the picture to his lips. RIFFONI dashes in between the pillars clad in his airman's costume. MOLP slips the photograph away.*]

RIFFONI [*Throwing his cap and coat to OMAR, who goes out with them*]

Don't be so shy—I know it's only little Nina. . . . Ouf, I wish I hadn't left word I'd call on Comrade Margherita at ten. I had to fly back just when I espied the Rolmenian vanguard.

MOLP

What a pity! For Her Majesty—er—Comrade Margherita—begs to be excused. She cannot receive you this morning.

RIFFONI [*Angrily*]

Eh?

MOLP

She has a headache.

RIFFONI [*Furious*]

Those feminine headaches! She had one yesterday,

and she'll have one to-morrow—and for as long as we leave her head on her shoulders. Did she look headachy ?

MOLP

I saw only Signora da Grasso.

RIFFONI

Ha ! In providing her with a Dame of Honour we have supplied her with a medium for her mendacity. I told Cazotti it was a mistake to continue this fairy-tale ritual. She should have had the dungeon for her boudoir, with the rats for courtiers.

MOLP

What have her courtiers proved but rats ?

RIFFONI

Not all. More died for her than she deserved. I at least have no obligation to put up with her majestic megrims. Tell her I must insist on paying my respects.

MOLP

Respects ? . . . Yes, my President.

[Going towards the curtains.]

RIFFONI

One moment, Molp. Now that the last of the Whites are accounted for, we shan't need the guards, even in the corridor.

MOLP [*Alarmed*]

Oh, but you mustn't withdraw Vanni entirely.

RIFFONI [*Smiling*]

I won't—nor my confidence in you.

[*Lays hand amicably on his shoulder*]

I was only testing you.

MOLP [*Wounded*]

You had my word.

RIFFONI

But the Queen is terribly fascinating—remember Fiuma—and you seemed so moved, so solicitous.

MOLP

She is so young, so pitiable.

RIFFONI

Oh, you soldiers! You wouldn't be so sympathetic if she were ugly and coarsehanded, like a woman who has worked for her food.

MOLP

If you doubt me, my President, let me resign.

RIFFONI

Ah, you want to get out of dragooning her—she must be a witch. . . . Hark you, Comrade, if you try any tricks against the Republic——! . . . Forgive me, my nerves are on edge. I didn't sleep last night. . . . When are you bringing little Nina to see me?

MOLP

I haven't brought her yet from her grandmother's.

RIFFONI

Ah, you are afraid the Rolmenians will really get to Scaletta—don't deny it!

MOLP

Since our troops are retreating before them——!

RIFFONI

Faintheart. . . . Ah, here is the new Commissary. Look! There's cheerfulness for you.

[CAZOTTI enters between the pillars, spruced up, clean-shaven and frock-coated, a portfolio under his arm, and in his whole bearing the jocundity of a salvaged skipper, his foot again on his quarter-deck.]

MOLP

I will deliver your message to Comrade Margherita.

[Exit to the interior.]

RIFFONI *[Shaking hands]*

Good morning, Cazotti, you look yourself again.

CAZOTTI

And you look somebody else. What's the matter?

RIFFONI

Insomnia—and news from General Hussein that sent me scouting at dawn. But read for yourself.

[Tenders war-report.]

CAZOTTI [*Perusing it*]

Ah, Roxo and Igmor are a tough combination. . . . And Roxo was always clever with cavalry. But surely this swift advance of theirs plays into your hands.

RIFFONI

How so ?

CAZOTTI

Won't it soon bring them within range of your aerial torpedoes ? In fact Hussein ought to feign retreating faster.

RIFFONI [*Startled*]

Feign retreating ?

CAZOTTI

If you are sure the torpedoes are all-annihilating.

RIFFONI

Yes, but then our troops would be between them and the enemy ! And if some of the Kites fell short and annihilated ourselves ! . . . Besides, you can't put the ranks in the secret. And imagine a demoralised army falling back on Scaletta—they might sow panic and revolution, paralyse even our Kite corps.

[*Smiling*]

No, Cazotti, stick to the problems of the Interior.

CAZOTTI [*Opening portfolio*]

I've done so. I, too, haven't slept. Here are the edicts I promised to draft for you.

RIFFONI

Already? You're a miracle. But leave them on my table, will you—it is high time I ran over to the War Office to wire Hussein my ideas.

CAZOTTI

I am astonished at his giving way so—it was I that originally promoted him, despite the anti-Moslem prejudice. But do sign these at once.

RIFFONI

I must study them—wait five minutes, please.

[Hurries out through the curtains. CAZOTTI, rather annoyed, steps on the dais to deposit the edicts. VANNI appears at the pillars.]

VANNI

Oh, Excellency, for the blessed Mary's sake——!

CAZOTTI *[Turning]*

Such words here?

VANNI

It was a slip of the tongue, Excellen—Comrade. But Stefano—they're hanging him to-morrow! And you promised——!

CAZOTTI

When I said I'd get your brother-in-law off, I didn't know that besides making brooches he sold them with the Queen's head.

VANNI

It was only the old stock, Excellency. He didn't like to waste them. And he lost an eye in the Bosnian war.

CAZOTTI

But if the Tribunal condemned him—— !

VANNI

They didn't dare not to——

[Lowers his voice]

The President is so jealous of the Queen's pictures.

CAZOTTI

And I don't dare, either. What would the People say ?

VANNI

But they're saying it's a bloody shame. Oh !

[Claps his hand to his mouth.]

CAZOTTI

Then why don't they say it aloud ?

VANNI

Oh, your Excellency, if we only whisper, we feel the flies are listening. Our shadows seem like spies following us. His wife's the only one who won't keep her mouth padlocked—in fact Fenella's been trying to turn my own men against the Government—if it wasn't for pity of her hysterics, they'd have denounced my poor sister.

CAZOTTI [*Lightly*]
Then there's no chance of her turning them ?

VANNI
Not while we get more grub than the civilians.
[*Enter through the pillars SALARET bearing a portfolio, but minus his wonted spectacles.*]

CAZOTTI [*Loudly*]
Not another word, Corporal, it is impossible to raise your rations.

SALARET
Is he grumbling again ?

CAZOTTI
Old soldiers always grumble.
[*VANNI sneaks back to his corridor*]
But what's happened to you ?

SALARET
Happened ? Oh, you mean my spectacles ! They broke, and the only decent opticians are dead or fled. Fortunately I can see to read or write, though I can't see far.

CAZOTTI
No—or you would have foreseen the flight of skilled labour.

SALARET [*Angrily*]
Have done ! I have had enough of your criticisms.

And, short-sighted as I am, I can see you are here to help the Queen.

CAZOTTI [*Enjoying himself*]

Lynx !

SALARET

Why else did you rush to receive her yesterday ?

CAZOTTI

But I haven't even seen her yet—nor D'Azollo either. I merely made arrangements for them. As a matter of fact, it will be rather awkward to meet my fellow-refugees.

SALARET

But Signora da Grasso—last night when you suggested my smuggling her over from the yacht for the Queen's service, I was grateful to you for facilitating our romance. But on reflection I saw you were making things easier for the Queen, not for me.

CAZOTTI

I am making them easier for myself. I couldn't risk having one of my prisoners gallivanting on a yacht. Riffoni might have strung me up at your side—Comrade.

SALARET

Riffoni has no time to visit yachts.

CAZOTTI

But somebody might have put him on the scent—
and the lady has a strong one. . . .

[*Sniffing*]

Phew! You must have slept in the Palace!

SALARET [*Tugging at his beard*]

How you try to nose out everything!

CAZOTTI

Better I than Riffoni. The lady understands, I hope,
she is supposed to have come straight from prison.

SALARET

Armida is prudent.

CAZOTTI

Armida? Ha! ha! ha! And does she call you
Rinaldo?

SALARET [*Angrily*]

Youth is not the only quality that attracts a woman's
sense of romance.

CAZOTTI

No—especially when she that loses her heart shall
save her head. So you actually think she loves you
for your beautiful eyes!

SALARET

I know it.

CAZOTTI

Aha ! It is for her you broke your spectacles !

SALARET

You chaff like a college-student.

CAZOTTI

Why not shave off *your* beard and be as young as I ?

SALARET

I am younger—a great passion rejuvenates.

CAZOTTI

Yes, to second childhood. Fancy putting yourself in the power of your own subordinate, the Commissary of Police !

SALARET

But Komak is in *my* power too.

CAZOTTI

You knew he was bribed not to find the Queen ?

SALARET [*Startled*]

You know ?

CAZOTTI [*Laughingly*]

Considering it was I who paid him his monthly subsidy from Gripstein !

SALARET

Of course—I am stupid. . . .

[*With sudden alarm*]

But you won't give him away now? If he were arrested, he might round on *me*.

CAZOTTI

Highly probable. No, I won't give him away—it is much more useful to have him in my pocket. But you will scarcely expect me to believe in your devotion to the Republic!

SALARET

I never attached importance to the Queen's capture—indeed it only saddles us with a problem. But Riffoni was always so obsessed about her.

CAZOTTI

Aha! *Cherchez la femme* in a double sense, eh?

SALARET

More college humour—you rightly said he's an ascetic.

CAZOTTI

So were you—till you were tempted. I expect she injected the fire when he saw her at Gripstein's.

SALARET

Don't be absurd, I tell you. He hates women, the Queen most of all.

CAZOTTI [*Going towards curtains with his portfolio*]

Well, anyhow, keep Armida out of his way.

SALARET [*Scandalised*]

Signora da Grasso ?

CAZOTTI

He's been noticeably restless since her aroma permeated these corridors.

SALARET

You are trying to make me jealous—to divide us and rule.

CAZOTTI

Owl ! I meant he might get wind of your relations.

SALARET

Armida is prudent, I tell you. . . .

[*With renewed alarm*]

Oh, but D'Azzolo—you didn't tell him about—— ?

[*Pauses shyly.*]

CAZOTTI

About his yacht ? How shocked the old penitent would be to learn it is still the seat of Satan ! But calm yourself—knowledge is power, and I had so little power just then I kept all I had to myself. . . . But soft ! I smell brimstone . . . !

[*HE moves aside to let SIGNORA DA GRASSO enter. SHE sweeps by him in all her exotic beauty, natural and artificial*]

Good morning, Signora da Grasso !

ESTER DA GRASSO [*Turning with feigned surprise*]

You *here*, Count Cazotti ?

CAZOTTI

Didn't Salaret tell you ?

ESTER DA GRASSO

Salaret ?

CAZOTTI [*Impishly*]

My colleague—Let me introduce you.

ESTER DA GRASSO [*Taken in by his blandness and bowing slightly*]

How do you do, Signor Salaret ?

SALARET [*Furious, but restraining himself*]

I hope you slept well.

ESTER DA GRASSO

Beautifully, thank you. Such a change from the prison. . . . So, Count Cazotti, you've turned Red.

CAZOTTI

I thought *you* would, when he asked how you slept.

ESTER DA GRASSO [*Blushing and disconcerted*]

He knows ?

SALARET

I've already damned him for a devil.

CAZOTTI

Ha ! ha ! ha ! . . . Armida is prudent.

[HE moves laughingly towards the curtains, but, as with a sudden thought, turns and goes out the other way.]

SALARET [*Approaching* ESTER]

Don't look so upset, *carissima*. I've sold him my soul for his silence.

[*Tries to take her hand.*]

ESTER DA GRASSO [*Snatching it away*]

Let me be ! Why didn't you warn me ? . . . Where is Riffoni the Red ?

SALARET

Sh ! What do you want of him ?

ESTER DA GRASSO

The Queen sent me to say she prefers to come to *him*.

SALARET

Really ? Why should she humiliate herself ?

ESTER DA GRASSO

It's pride, not humility. She won't have her apartments profaned by the brute's presence.

SALARET

Hush, I tell you.

ESTER DA GRASSO

Oh, you are always a jelly before him. Hardly Rinaldo's way, was it ?

SALARET

You don't understand. I care for Vittorio and I care for our Republic.

ESTER DA GRASSO

Yes, for everything except me.

SALARET

You know that's not true.

ESTER DA GRASSO

It is true—you let that cad Cazotti insult me.

SALARET

He insulted me too : we can only comfort each other.

[Throws down his portfolio]

Give me a kiss.

ESTER DA GRASSO *[Recoiling]*

Aren't you sated yet ?

SALARET

My love is infinite.

ESTER DA GRASSO

Yes, without beginning.

SALARET

After I've put away my glasses to please you !

[*Seizes her hands*]

Just one !

ESTER DA GRASSO [*Wriggling her face from his lips*]

Not here !

SALARET [*Facetiously*]

Well, *there* !

[*Dabs a kiss on her neck, while her face shows disgust*]

Why, you seem all strange. . . . Ah, you've changed your scent.

ESTER DA GRASSO

I've tried to wash it all away—the Queen didn't like it.

SALARET

That profaned her chamber, too, confound her ?

ESTER DA GRASSO

It aggravated her headache, poor thing. Are you going to murder her ?

SALARET

Ask the President. It's job enough to keep *you* alive. Even before the Revolution you helped your husband to shoot down his peasants, and the fact that he has

escaped only makes the mob bitterer against you. Sh! I hear Vittorio's footsteps.

[THEY move apart. RIFFONI re-enters by the curtains, sniffing involuntarily.]

RIFFONI

Good morning, Salaret. . . . Who is this lady ?

SALARET

The Dame of Honour Cazotti selected from the prisoners. She says the Queen wants to come to you.

RIFFONI

Aha ! Margherita begins to understand our relative positions.

[*Eagerly*]

When will she come ?

ESTER DA GRASSO

At once, Signor.

RIFFONI [*Recoiling*]

No, no, I can't see her now.

[*Ascends the dais and takes up CAZOTTI's drafts*]

I have my work. I will send for her when I want her. Tell her so.

ESTER DA GRASSO

I will—but not in that tone.

[*Sweeps out haughtily, her lips moving vituperatively. RIFFONI, plunging resolutely into CAZOTTI's drafts, pays no attention to her.*]

SALARET [*Uneasily covering her defiance*]
A beautiful creature, is she not ?

RIFFONI [*Not looking up*]
So far as I remember.

SALARET
Remember ? Why, you've just seen her.

RIFFONI
Oh, you mean that enchantress !

SALARET [*Crestfallen*]
You don't admire her ?

RIFFONI
One can see you've broken your glasses. A woman whose sex reeks and shrieks at you, the quintessence of that sinister force that perverts thought and saps purpose ; one of the worst incarnations of the old order. Hardly a fit companion for a presumably virgin Queen. . . . Where's Cazotti ? I asked him to wait.

[*Rings violently.*]

SALARET
He went that way. . . .
[*Moves towards pillars*]
Ah, he is talking to Vanni.
[*Enter OMAR.*]

RIFFONI

Tell Comrade Cazotti I am back. He is in the corridor.

[OMAR *salaams and exit*]

If you had done your duty, Salaret, she would have been executed long ago.

SALARET [*Startled*]

I couldn't help the Queen's not being caught before.

RIFFONI

Who is speaking of the Queen? I mean that scented Signora—why have you kept her untried all these months?

SALARET [*Tugging at his beard*]

Hers was merely a case of preventive arrest—if I remember aright. . . . Or was she a hunger-striker too ill to be tried?

RIFFONI

A hunger-striker? Ha! ha! ha! Happily the Home Department is in sterner hands now.

[*Enter CAZOTTI with OMAR, who goes back. RIFFONI waves a draft*]

Ah, Cazotti, we were just talking of hunger-strikes. And your hunger lock-out will be such a logical counter.

CAZOTTI

You've hit off my programme precisely. Logic—that is what I want our State to exemplify.

SALARET [*Taking the draft uneasily*]

What is this hunger lock-out ? . . . Our peasants work splendidly.

RIFFONI

And grow their own food. You can't cut off *their* rations. But in the towns, the slackers, strikers, and those who won't work on Saints'-days——

SALARET

Madness ! There's too much logic already, Vittorio—you're only too blind to life.

RIFFONI

I like that ! When I follow your books !

SALARET

My books are pure mathematics. But life, like practical engineering, is applied mathematics—it has to take count of the obstacles and materials.

CAZOTTI

Surely our workers must be taught that now our workshops are nationalised, they have no more right to strike than a soldier to mutiny. A Workers' Republic that won't work is beyond a joke.

SALARET

But you have to deal with myriads. Even Roxo couldn't shoot down a battalion.

CAZOTTI

No, but he would have shot down every tenth man.

RIFFONI

That is an idea. Even though the enemy is on our soil, the turnout of the Kite-factories is in inverse proportion to the demand for rations and wages. It is high time the masses should realise that there is no inexhaustible source of wealth to be perpetually parcelled out, that the storehouse once emptied can be refilled only by their own labours——

CAZOTTI [*Blandly*]

Perhaps you didn't realise it yourself, while the cupboard was full. But now the logic of legislation must meet the logic of facts.

SALARET

Too much logic is simply dynamite.

RIFFONI

And doesn't the practical engineer use dynamite ?

SALARET

You will blow up the State. But perhaps that's what Cazotti wants.

[*Throws down the draft angrily.*]

RIFFONI [*Pained and picking up the draft*]

Salaret, that is not fair criticism. . . . There's only one thing I must strike out of your draft, Cazotti, and that is the quotation from St. Paul—I'm afraid I can't cite that in my edict.

CAZOTTI [*Reading from the draft*]

"If any man will not work, neither shall he eat" ?
But surely that will bowl over the Cardinal.

RIFFONI

It will prop up St. Paul.

SALARET

The President is right. Socialism will be suspected of Christianity.

RIFFONI

Then with your permission, Comrade Cazotti, out it goes.

CAZOTTI

Why, my permission ? The edict is yours—I merely offer suggestions.

RIFFONI [*Striking out the quotation*]

Good ! . . . Then here is my signature.

[*Writes. CAZOTTI snatches at the draft*]

Wait, it'll smudge.

[*Blots it, CAZOTTI is snatching at it again*]

Stop a moment ! Does it say women-slackers shall be locked-out too ?

CAZOTTI [*Chuckling as he takes it*]

Trust me to give them full sex-equality.

RIFFONI

A pity you make us cocker Margherita so—I'd like to see those white arms deep in the wash-trough.

SALARET

Don't be so truculent, Vittorio.

CAZOTTI [*Impatient to get his dynamite exploded*]

Would you mind signing the alcohol prohibition ?

[RIFFONI *becomes absorbed in the other draft.*]

SALARET

Has she really got such white arms, Cazotti ?

CAZOTTI

The Queen ? Oh yes—she's beautiful enough if she wouldn't look so gloomy.

SALARET

I've only seen her from afar like a shrined idol. Then she isn't beautiful only by the royal standard ?

CAZOTTI

The royal standard. Ha ! ha ! ha ! Yes, it's pretty low. The pig-eyes of Prince Igmor are "blazing orbs of war" in the Rolmenian literature.

RIFFONI [*Without looking up from the draft*]

And that's the man she was ready to sell her beauty to !

CAZOTTI

Fortunately I was able to stop the transaction. . . .
Need you study it so minutely ?

[RIFFONI, *apparently re-absorbed, does not reply.*]

SALARET

They say her mother's marriage was a still more scandalous transaction.

CAZOTTI

What would you ? Royal marriages are made in the War Office. But do you remember the sensation when King Tito brought home his northern bride ?

SALARET

I was studying in Germany—I remember only the sensation at her murder.

CAZOTTI

Ah, that is another reason why we must go gingerly with the daughter. Margherita's trial must be solemnly staged at the High Court, with all deliberateness and dignity.

RIFFONI [*Flinging away his pen*]

Fiddlesticks !

CAZOTTI

I didn't know you were listening. But it is the only possible course. Precipitation would seem assassination. Your crude new tribunals with their ranting amateur lawyers and their turbulent courts, from which the bourgeois are excluded—what you call the justice of the People——

RIFFONI [*Springing up*]

Then while your obsolete mummeries are preparing,

the vixen who drew the sword of Alpastroom is to live in her Palace, the centre of a thousand secret sympathies !

CAZOTTI

Why did you bring her to the Palace ? But as for sympathies, surely you heard the mob howling yesterday for her blood.

RIFFONI

Under the eye of Komak—I remembered afterwards——

CAZOTTI

Then if they really don't want her to die, why put her to death ?

RIFFONI

All the more reason. Every day she breathes would be a breathing-space for the counter-revolution.

CAZOTTI

But also for the Republic. Once she is executed, you won't find even commercial dealings easy, especially with the king-ridden countries.

RIFFONI

Humph ! What say you, Salaret ?

SALARET

I understand Cazotti's point of view.

CAZOTTI [*Turning on him*]
What do you mean by insinuating—— ?

SALARET
Insinuating ?

CAZOTTI
That I am trying to delay her execution !

SALARET
I never said so.

CAZOTTI
And that I am in secret communication with Roxo !

SALARET [*Sullenly*]
It is you who say it.

RIFFONI
Comrades, friends, what is the matter with you ?

CAZOTTI
Salaret reeks with suspicions like Signora da Grasso with patchouli. I'd rather throw up my job—I can work only in an atmosphere of confidence.

RIFFONI [*Dominated and deprecatory*]
But all he said was he understood your point of view. And so do I—on reflection. A ceremonious State trial certainly—worthy of the dignity of the Workers' Republic. Only let it be staged without delay. Will you see to the arrangements ?

CAZOTTI

I suppose it falls within my department. . . . The alcohol prohibition still waits your signature.

[RIFFONI *sits and signs the second draft without further study and CAZOTTI blots and seizes it*]

Thanks ! I'll have them both printed and placarded at once. Apropos, among a batch of misdemeanants sentenced yesterday afternoon and to be hanged to-morrow, I find that one lost an eye in the Bosnian war. I propose to pardon him on that ground.

RIFFONI

By all means—and it will remind the People of the horrors of the old *régime*.

[*Takes a paper*]

I will sign the pardon at once.

CAZOTTI

Thank you. I don't need your signature.

SALARET [*Sharply*]

Why not ?

CAZOTTI

Coming from the President, the pardon would savour of the bad old royal prerogative. Coming from me, it will seem to come from his comrades, the People !

RIFFONI

Cazotti is right.

CAZOTTI

Similarly should you be thinking of pardoning the Duke——

RIFFONI [*Springing up*]

D'Azzolo? *Corpo di Bacco*, I had forgotten all about him!

CAZOTTI

Then I'm glad I reminded you, for his future too will need settling.

RIFFONI [*Perturbed*]

Need one trouble about such a meagre future?

CAZOTTI

Once the Queen is disposed of, reaction may take *him* for its focus. Remember he has been Regent.

RIFFONI [*Drops on the throne again*]

You are always right. Ah, what a comfort to have your solid intellect to rest on—especially on a day when I seem unable to fix my thoughts.

[*Strikes the bell. Enter OMAR*]

Find Colonel Molp and ask him to bring the Duke D'Azzolo.

[*Exit OMAR, salaaming. CAZOTTI is following him*]

No, don't go, Cazotti. I want you both to sit beside me.

CAZOTTI

You are not going to try him now?

RIFFONI

Of course not. I suppose he, too, would be a High Court case.

[SALARET *seats himself on RIFFONI's right*]

You take this chair, Cazotti, I want to impress him.

CAZOTTI

I have better things to do than impress an old dotard.

RIFFONI

Not such a dotard—it was his wit barbed the *Sera*.
I recognized the D'Azollo sting.

CAZOTTI [*Moving away*]

But I *must* get these posted up.

RIFFONI

Very well—let me see a proof, though, first, especially of the drink decree. . . . But I warn you I have a weakness for the Duke.

CAZOTTI [*Going towards the pillared exit*]

That doesn't alarm me. I know that the greater your affection for a person, the more sternly would you guard the interests of the Republic. Am I not right, Salaret ?

SALARET

Oh, damn the Duke !

CAZOTTI [*Laughingly*]

Precisely what I ask.

SALARET

The truth is, Vittorio, Cazotti is ashamed to meet him.

CAZOTTI

Ashamed ? I never said that.

[Turns indignantly and remounts the dais.]

RIFFONI

I don't understand you to-day, Salaret.

[Strikes the gong once. VANNI and his men appear]

Stay here and salute Colonel Molp when he enters.

VANNI

Yes, my President.

CAZOTTI *[Taking his seat]*

Won't the Duke imagine the salute is for *him* ?

RIFFONI

And if he does, poor old ruin ? And don't you think if we get his promise to accept the Republic—— ?

CAZOTTI

A promise ? Fetters made of breath.

RIFFONI

Of the breath of a gentleman, Cazotti.

CAZOTTI

But his memory is so bad !

RIFFONI

Sh ! His hearing is good.

[The curtains rustle, and RIFFONI on his throne between his two ministers takes a majestic pose, while the GUARDS stand rigidly. SALARET caresses his beard. CAZOTTI'S aplomb seems for once to fail him and he rolls and unrolls his drafts. The DUKE totters in, followed by MOLP. Though perceptibly aged, D'AZOLLO is the speckless old dandy of yore. The GUARDS present arms. The DUKE and MOLP acknowledge the salute. RIFFONI surveys his prisoner complacently for a silent moment]

Well, Your Highness, I told you I should return.

DUKE D'AZOLLO *[Drily]*

Yes, I heard you were back.

RIFFONI

Ha ! ha ! ha ! You haven't lost your wit—or your elegance. How do you manage it ?

DUKE D'AZOLLO

These are the secrets of the bad old capitalist order—like courtesy to the aged and weary

RIFFONI

I beg your pardon—give him a chair !

[MOLP hands the DUKE a chair.]

DUKE D'AZOLLO *[Sitting down]*

Thank you ! . . . And what do you propose to do with me ?

RIFFONI

Humph ! Not so easy as disposing of your yacht—my colleague, Professor Salaret, has put that to better uses than you ever did.

DUKE D'AZOLLO

I sincerely hope so. How do you do, Professor ? People known to the public are known to one another, as Euclid should have said. I have enjoyed your books—much more than Karl Marx's at any rate—and I am sorry our meeting in the flesh should be under such unhappy circumstances.

SALARET

They could not well be happier for *me*, Your Highness.

DUKE D'AZOLLO

I sit rebuked. But it is a consolation to see Cazotti in your ranks.

CAZOTTI

Eh ?

DUKE D'AZOLLO

He will avenge us all !

SALARET

Ha ! ha ! ha ! The Duke is in form.

CAZOTTI

The Duke is ungrateful. It is to my presence in the Government—if you will permit me to tell him so—

that he and the Queen stand indebted for their considerate treatment. Let me tell him too that it is to him I owe my conversion to your form of Socialism.

DUKE D'AZOLLO

To me ?

CAZOTTI

The wisdom you scattered at Baron Gripstein's—those little forgotten seeds have a way of germinating.

RIFFONI [*Eagerly*]

Ah, I remember ! And since Your Highness favoured Socialism platonically—— ?

DUKE D'AZOLLO

Quite the contrary. I distinctly remember leading the debate for the negative.

RIFFONI

Where ?

DUKE D'AZOLLO

At my University.

RIFFONI

I am speaking of a year ago, not a century.

DUKE D'AZOLLO

Santa Maria, my memory !

RIFFONI

You were ready to go up Mont Rouge—by telescope at least.

DUKE D'AZOLLO

Ah, something begins to glimmer, God forgive me.

RIFFONI

And now that the mountain is scaled by foot—and the Red Flag planted at the peak——

DUKE D'AZOLLO

But your State is an abomination. Without free speech or free art or free movement ! A dead-house !

RIFFONI [*Taking up a number of the Sera*]

Last month you called it only a forcing house.

DUKE D'AZOLLO

Did I ? I am so glad. Yes, it is Socialism while you won't wait. Not a Paradise of blossoming brotherhood, not a natural growth under God's heaven, but a Socialism ripened prematurely under the heat of compulsion and watered with blood : a Socialism under a sky of glass, unstable, sterile, without spontaneous sap, that can be perpetuated only by ever-renewed compulsion. And forced—good God!—from what seed ? Constricting figs in greenhouse pots will precipitate them artificially, but there is high authority for doubting if they can be gathered from thistles. And human nature is unfortunately thistly. I speak feelingly, for I was a forced child, artificially pietized

by a monastery of pedagogues. The result was the sailing brothel that Professor Salaret has purged.

CAZOTTI

Ha ! ha ! ha ! The Duke is in form.

SALARET

The Duke is in error. Our State is neither a dead-house nor a forcing house but a school-house.

DUKE D'AZOLLO

I certainly see the rod.

RIFFONI

You used it to keep down the masses : we to educate them. Did not Garibaldi, the champion of freedom, say they could reach liberty only through dictatorship ? Slave Socialism will beget free Socialism.

CAZOTTI

And don't forget, Duke, that to safeguard the young Republic, we have to live under martial law.

RIFFONI

Especially with Rolmenia never relaxing her attack.

SALARET

The censorship you jib at is merely the means to an end, and the end does not resemble the means any more than a fruit resembles its seed.

RIFFONI

But we won't be nipped in the bud by your aristocratic artists and thinkers !

DUKE D'AZOLLO [*Blandly*]

Are there any others ?

RIFFONI [*Passionately*]

Their art is worthless. Art and Thought must be of the People.

DUKE D'AZOLLO

Good God ! My peasants turned my library into cigarette-papers and my grand piano into a manure-sleigh. Aren't you satisfied with handing politics over to the People—the lowest thought of the greatest number !

CAZOTTI [*Seeing the others a bit disconcerted*]

The voice of the People is the voice of God.

DUKE D'AZOLLO

Then the voice of God needs training.

RIFFONI [*Unsmiling*]

Precisely. I knew you were with us at heart. Come, Duke, I am sure we can find a formula to spare your life.

DUKE D'AZOLLO

My life ! What do these dregs matter ? Ah, Vittorio, if you must take vengeance on the old order, let *me* be its representative, not the Queen.

RIFFONI

You offer your dregs for her brimming sparkle ?

DUKE D'AZOLLO

Alas, it is all I can offer.

RIFFONI

You have nothing to offer. Your life is separately forfeit to the Republic. If you wish to redeem it, you must recognise that the old order is dead.

DUKE D'AZOLLO

Dead ? Scarred perhaps, but titanically strong and crafty, like one of those great old whales that go careering about the oceans, stuck full of harpoons. Believe me, Capital has a long swim before it, and will yet upset your boat with a flick of its mighty tail.

RIFFONI

I only ask *you* not to bore holes in the boat. Give me your word and you go free, with undisturbed possession for life of your town house at least.

CAZOTTI

A too generous offer. But I am ready to write you a free pardon.

DUKE D'AZOLLO

God forgive you ! . . . You say, Vittorio, I repudiated Capitalism ?

RIFFONI

Yes, at Gripstein's.

DUKE D'AZOLLO

Who wouldn't repudiate it *there* ? . . . But did I ever repudiate my Queen ?

[*Anxiously*]

Tell me that !

RIFFONI

I am afraid not.

DUKE D'AZOLLO

Thank God ! Then, Vittorio, it all depends on whether you will give up that seat to her.

CAZOTTI [*Dropping his drafts*]

Put her back on the throne ?

RIFFONI

You can't have a Queen in a Socialist State.

DUKE D'AZOLLO

Why not ?

RIFFONI

It's a patent absurdity—unheard of !

DUKE D'AZOLLO

How conventional you are ! But if there is no place in your State for the Queen, there is none for me. I go with her to the end.

CAZOTTI

Amen !

[Picks up his drafts and remains standing]

And now I suppose I may get on with my work.

RIFFONI *[Ignoring him]*

Then you would abandon the Duchess to a lonely old age in an enemy country ?

DUKE D'AZOLLO *[Eagerly]*

She has arrived in Bosnavina ? You are sure ?

RIFFONI

According to our Socialist spies, Gripstein's major-domo smuggled her across the frontier.

DUKE D'AZOLLO

Well done, Brio ! Ah, he was our good angel. He even did the housework.

RIFFONI *[Smiling]*

In his white gloves ? An excellent training for the Workers' Republic. And Margherita, I suppose, basked and purred by the fire.

DUKE D'AZOLLO *[Springing up]*

Speak more respectfully ! Murder the Queen, but do not insult her.

RIFFONI

Speak more respectfully yourself. A State does not murder.

DUKE D'AZOLLO

Spare me verbal quibbles. Words were given us to drape our actions. Her Majesty did all we would permit her to do.

RIFFONI

Did she make her own bed ?

DUKE D'AZOLLO

Yes, and my ailing wife's too.

RIFFONI

First Lady of the Bedchamber. Ha ! ha ! ha !

DUKE D'AZOLLO

Brio could have got her across the frontier at the same time as my wife, only she would not desert her country so long as there was any hope of helping it.

RIFFONI [*Meaningly*]

Ha ! And I suppose *you* preferred to remain with *her* !

DUKE D'AZOLLO [*Re-seating himself placidly*]

Cazotti was so sure the Republic would collapse.

CAZOTTI

I ? It was Gripstein who kept insisting it was bankrupt.

RIFFONI

Bah ! Bankruptcy is only another way of spelling national debt.

DUKE D'AZOLLO [*Smiling*]

And in the end *we* were bankrupt—through Gripstein's arrest. That's why we were caught. . . . Oh, my memory! What have you done with the poor Baron?

RIFFONI

Don't worry—he won't stay poor long. How do you mean you were caught because you were bankrupt?

DUKE D'AZOLLO

Obviously we couldn't go on outbribing the reward on our heads.

RIFFONI [*Springing to his feet*]
Outbribing?

SALARET [*Tugging his beard*]

Our Commissary bribed? Impossible! Why, he—
[*Stops short with a sudden perception he has said too much.*]

RIFFONI [*Thundering*]
Who is this dog?

CAZOTTI

That is the question. There are so many Police Commissaries. But of course you can't trust His Highness's memory.

DUKE D'AZOLLO :

Not if you ask me his name—for I never knew it. But you ought to know, Cazotti, since it was you who paid his monthly account.

RIFFONI [*Turning fiercely on CAZOTTI*]

You paid him ?

CAZOTTI [*Smiling sturdily*]

The finances always seem my job.

RIFFONI

You knew one of our Police Commissaries was a traitor and you failed to inform me ?

CAZOTTI

Cazotti does not betray those who serve him.

RIFFONI

Then it seems he betrays those he serves.

CAZOTTI

Pardon me ! My very first thought was to get rid of the rogue quietly.

SALARET [*Astounded*]

You have dismissed him ?

CAZOTTI [*Dramatically handing RIFFONI a letter*]

Here is the letter I was just despatching. . . . No, no, give it me back. I forgot it has his name.

RIFFONI [*Refusing with a gesture and reading*]
Komak! . . . The Commissary in Chief!! Impossible!

SALARET

That's what I said. Komak is a pioneer of the faith—my son's bosom friend.

RIFFONI

A serpent in the State's bosom!

DUKE D'AZOLLO

He! he! he! A very talking serpent. An agreeable young rattle—a droll mixture of impulses. The day he arrested us, he explained apologetically that he could not afford to lose the reward—I understood he was in collusion with a mock informant. He even kissed me, maundering I reminded him of his aged father, and he asked me for my blessing and forgiveness.

RIFFONI

Drunk into the bargain!

DUKE D'AZOLLO [*Shaking his head*]

Sober as a Moslem. I expect he had Bosnavinian blood. They have this odd emotionalism. He even wished to embrace the Queen.

RIFFONI

That's not so odd.

DUKE D'AZOLLO

Ah, but the tears were streaming down his cheeks. He was so sorry he couldn't afford to give up the reward for her sake.

SALARET

The poor fellow must have needed money desperately.

RIFFONI

For orgies? . . . Was it you who appointed him? The wretch who failed to feed the children was also your selection. You seem unfortunate——

SALARET

But for Komak's generosity Guido could never have invented the Kites.

RIFFONI

His generosity will not save him.

SALARET

It saved Gripstein.

RIFFONI [*Re-seating himself to fill up an order for arrest*]

There is no parallel between the cases. Gripstein was an avowed enemy.

SALARET

My boy will be heartbroken.

RIFFONI [*Writing*]

I can well imagine it. To lose at once his friend and his faith in him. What can be more tragic ? Colonel Molp, escort the Duke to his room and see that this arrest is made instantly. . . . I am sorry Your Highness should have formed a mean opinion of the Republic's integrity—you will now witness its justice.

DUKE D'AZOLLO [*Who has risen*]

The test of a State is not the justice meted out to the guilty but the justice meted out to the innocent. Touch a hair of the Queen's head, Signori, and history will write you down poltroons and assassins.

CAZOTTI

Ah, but it is we who will write the histories now.

[*The DUKE bows silently and totters out through the curtains, which MOLP parts for him. CAZOTTI holds out his hand to RIFFONI*]

Congratulations, Comrade !

RIFFONI [*Fiercely waving it aside*]

On what ? On the rottenness of the Republic ?

CAZOTTI

On your firmness with the Duke.

RIFFONI

The Duke ? Did I decide about him ? I am distracted. . . . Whom can I trust if a Komak fails me ?

[*SALARET rises*]

Where are you going ?

SALARET

I feel I ought to see Komak safely arrested.

RIFFONI

Why? It is not your Department now. Molp won't let him escape. Do sit down—there is so much to discuss.

SALARET

But I have urgent financial business—there's a crisis.

RIFFONI

When Cazotti's accession has already put the exchange up?

[ESTER DA GRASSO *parts the curtains.* RIFFONI
turns testily on her]

What is it now?

ESTER DA GRASSO [*Coming forward*]

Her Majesty begs you to receive her at once.

RIFFONI

I told you she must await my pleasure.

ESTER DA GRASSO

Waiting is so unnerving. She wants to get the interview over.

RIFFONI

I—I won't see her to-day at all.

ESTER DA GRASSO

That's a blessing.

[*Turns to go.*]

RIFFONI

Insolence ! Tell her she must come at once.

[*ESTER DA GRASSO shrugs her shoulders and continues her walk.*]

ESTER DA GRASSO [*At exit*]

I hope you will remember that Her Majesty has a headache.

RIFFONI

Corporal Vanni, take those men away !

VANNI

Right turn, quick march !

[*Exeunt.*]

CAZOTTI

Why did you send them away ?

RIFFONI

I thought they might salute her—or you suggest it.

CAZOTTI

They would have been as useful to impress her as to impress the Duke.

RIFFONI

I don't want to impress her.

CAZOTTI

Really ? Then I suppose I can go.

RIFFONI

Ah, you *are* ashamed to meet your old friends.

CAZOTTI [*Wincing*]

I have my work.

[*Exit CAZOTTI by the pillars, carrying the ukases.*

RIFFONI *sits brooding darkly.* SALARET, *who has resumed his seat sullenly, is tugging at his beard.*]

SALARET

Vittorio, you surely won't press for the death-penalty ?

RIFFONI

Why should she escape the doom of a Marie Antoinette ?

SALARET

She ? We are at cross-purposes to-day. I was speaking of Komak.

RIFFONI

Komak ! You bring that up again !

SALARET

Only for my boy's sake.

RIFFONI

Were it Guido himself, I should string him up !

SALARET

Oh! . . . This is your friendship . . . And I, were I
in your place——

RIFFONI [*Starting up*]

What a good idea! *Take* my place.

SALARET

Your place?

RIFFONI

Sit here and do the talking to the lady—what with the
Duke and Komak on top of a sleepless night my nerves
are on edge.

SALARET

Why not spare yourself then? There is no point in
our seeing her before the trial.

RIFFONI

None whatever. I will countermand her.

[*Rings. Enter OMAR*]

Tell Signora da Grasso that I cannot—that—that she
is not to accompany her mistress.

[*Sits down again shamefacedly. OMAR salaams
and exit*]

I had to say something—you see, on second thoughts,
I felt the Queen would think me an irresolute idiot.

SALARET

You said you didn't want to impress her.

RIFFONI

But I don't want to feed her vanity—make her feel irreplaceable! That's why I asked *you* to receive her—I'm quite unstrung.

SALARET

But without my spectacles I won't even see her face properly.

RIFFONI

All the better. It won't trouble your dignity.

SALARET [*Grudgingly*]

If I receive her, you must go and try to get a little sleep.

RIFFONI [*Rising*]

That *would* be wisest. . . . No, I have a curiosity to see the creature. Come, sit there and I'll sit here.

[*Motions SALARET to the throne and takes a chair on the far side of the table*]

She'll think I'm a secretary.

[*HE seizes a pen and heaps up papers, partly hiding his face.*]

SALARET [*Seating himself gingerly on the throne*]

What on earth am I to say to her?

RIFFONI

What on earth does it matter? We shall enjoy her humiliation.

SALARET

I shan't—I shall feel uncomfortable, I know. Surely you can do the talking yourself.

RIFFONI

And if I do, who knows where my hate may carry me? I shan't stop at the mealy-mouthed courtesies Cazotti would approve. At my first meeting with her, remember, I had to be dumb—that suppressed speech has been boiling in my veins ever since.

[There is a stir in the corridor—SALARET leaves the throne hurriedly and sits to the right.]

SALARET

I can talk just as well from here. She might think I was you.

RIFFONI [*Rising*]

Nonsense—trust her to have seen our pictures.

[Moves to the chair on the near side]

I'd better sit here—then I'll have my back to her when she comes in!

OMAR [*Parting the curtains*]

Way for the Queen!

RIFFONI [*Angrily*]

Why, who the devil told Omar——? . . . Quick! Don't leave her throne empty!

[SALARET scuttles back into it and tugs his beard.]

RIFFONI *again snatches a pen and heaps papers.*

The QUEEN enters slowly, sad, but with unbroken

dignity. SALARET rises instinctively, SHE bows silently. RIFFONI is ostentatiously writing, but with an obviously shaky hand.]

SALARET

Be seated, Madam, I am sorry I cannot offer you your usual seat.

QUEEN [*Taking the chair vacated by the DUKE*]

You are welcome to it, Signor Salaret.

SALARET

Your Majesty's recognition flatters me.

[Re-seats himself]

As you see I am deputising for the President ; he is so—overworked.

QUEEN

Please convey to him my appreciation of his courtesy in the matter of my apartments. I had not expected it.

SALARET [*Stroking his beard*]

The Workers' Republic is much maligned.

[There is an awkward pause. SHE looks round]

You find the Palace changed ?

QUEEN

It looks so military.

SALARET

Military, Madam ? Why, it was a positive barrack !

QUEEN [*Looking at the plain casement*]
At least the Madonna stood guard too.

SALARET

The Republic can dispense with her protection. . . .
But you can still find her undamaged in the Palace
chapel. Access is not denied you, I believe.

QUEEN

There are no priests.

SALARET

You would not have us enthrone superstition in our
own headquarters ?

QUEEN

Is the worship of the People a nobler superstition
than the worship of God ?

SALARET

The People at least is a reality. And we can make it
worthy of worship.

RIFFONI [*Murmuring*]

Bravo !

[SALARET *frowns in his direction.*]

QUEEN

Ah, the Duke always says nothing can shake the
credulity of atheists. . . . What do you mean to do
with him ?

SALARET

With D'Azollo ? He will be tried like you.

QUEEN

Poor old man ! What has *he* done ?

SALARET

What has he left undone ?

QUEEN

Cannot *my* death atone for his sins too ?

SALARET

I did not say you would be condemned to death.

QUEEN

Do not rob me of my last hope.

RIFFONI [*Dropping his pen*]

Eh ?

SALARET [*Equally amazed*]

You desire death ?

QUEEN

“He giveth His belovèd sleep.” O to be done with the duty of living !

[*Covers her eyes.*]

SALARET

Why should you wish to die ?

QUEEN

Why should I wish to survive my friends ? Ah, so many have been sent behind the black curtain—
Fiuma, Marrobio, Livia, Gripstein——

[*Her voice breaks.*]

RIFFONI [*Prompting* SALARET]

But Gripstein——

SALARET [*Annoyed*]

Yes, yes, I know. . . . Gripstein and the Baroness have been spared, Madam. As for Marrobio, murdered by a Bosnavinian patriot, he fell a victim to your imperialistic insanity.

RIFFONI [*Thumping the table*]

Bravo ! Bravissimo !

[*The QUEEN at last turns and looks in his direction.*]

SALARET

Restrain yourself, Comrade. You have spilt the ink.

RIFFONI [*Hoarsely*]

What is her answer ? You see she has no answer.

SALARET

What is your answer, Madam ?

QUEEN

It was Bosnavina declared war. I had no more power under my Government than I have under yours.

RIFFONI [*Springing up and facing her*]
It is false——!

SALARET [*Interjecting*]
Vittorio!

RIFFONI [*Fiercely uninterruptible*]
You drew the sword of Alpastroom, and girding it on Marrobio, bade him win back your Bosnavinian Duchy. What is your answer?

QUEEN [*Rising*]
I thank you, Signor Salaret, for your courtesy.
[*Bows and moves towards the curtains.*]

RIFFONI
Stop, Madam!
[*SHE moves disdainfully on. HE strikes the gong twice. VANNI and his GUARDS rush in.*]
Arrest her!

QUEEN [*Turning to face their bayonets*]
Corporal Vanni!
[*THEY shrink back.*]

RIFFONI
Arrest that woman, I tell you.
[*THEY surround her.*]

QUEEN [*Veering round to confront RIFFONI*]
Who are you that dare insult your Queen?

RIFFONI

That Queen's master.

QUEEN

Ha ! I thought you posed always in general's uniform. . . . So *you* are Riffoni the Red ?

RIFFONI

Yes. Last time I was Riffoni the Silent.

QUEEN

Last time ? We have met before ?

RIFFONI

At Baron Gripstein's.

QUEEN

So the Duke always insisted—but I thought it was his bad memory.

RIFFONI

It was your own, Madam. And yet I flattered myself I had made an impression. For you pronounced me intelligent—intelligent enough for higher work.

QUEEN [*With a flash of remembrance*]

Ah, you were Molp's man !

RIFFONI [*Grimly*]

No, I was not Molp's man, but Molp is my man. I hope I have justified your flattering augury. Yes, intelligent as I was, I was thrust out of your realm

that night, torn from my friends, my work, deported like a criminal.

QUEEN

It is what you have proved, Signor.

RIFFONI

Have a care how you insult the Republic !

QUEEN

An intelligent criminal is worse than a criminal fool. And murder, pillage——

RIFFONI

Be silent, woman ! . . . Withdraw, Vanni !

[VANNI *silently marches his men out, while RIFFONI without a pause continues vehemently*]

You to condemn murder, under whose rule I was first forced to kill ! Ah, the nausea that overcame me when I had to send a brother-airman shrivelling to the ground like a burnt moth !

QUEEN

And was it not enough our land was torn by wars of race and wars of religion and wars of revenge, must you add the war of classes ?

RIFFONI

And why may not war be waged perpendicularly as well as horizontally ? The war of classes is the only war worth waging, the war for a righteous order, the war to end war. It is the horizontal wars of grab and

glory that are immoral. Ah, what really excites the world's horror in our perpendicular campaign is that it is a blasphemy against the great god, Money; that it is the wealthy we combat, those who made of the masses a footstool for their feet and a cushion for their backs. But if we make them suffer in their turn, it is not for revenge but to shape the brotherhood of all.

QUEEN

Brotherhood cannot be shaped by steel like a dead log. It must grow slowly like a living tree, fed by the dews and rains, ripened by the sun——

SALARET

Ah, the forcing house again! She is a gramophone for the Duke's platitudes.

QUEEN

The Duke is wiser than you both. But it is not from the Duke I have learnt this wisdom—it is from Vittorio.

SALARET [*Astonished*]

Vittorio?

QUEEN [*Producing a dainty little volume*]

I carry his songs with me night and day.

RIFFONI [*Dazed*]

You read my father's poems?

[*HE descends almost unconsciously towards her.*]

QUEEN [*Equally amazed*]
Vittorio was your father ?

RIFFONI

He wrote under his Christian name.

QUEEN

He wrote Christianly indeed.

RIFFONI

And was done to death in this Palace of yours. On that balcony !

[*Points to the plain casement.*]

QUEEN

I am glad he did not live to see his son do others to death.

RIFFONI

They die that his ideas may live.

QUEEN [*Surveying the book*]

What a caricature of his doctrine of love !

RIFFONI

I deny it. Is love less love because like the sun it wears a face of flame ? Has not destruction also its angel ? This old malarial world needed a storm to purify it, to uproot its monstrous millennial growths. Ah, wait till the lightnings have ceased to sear, and the storm has blown by, and you behold the blue of the new heaven and the green of the new earth.

QUEEN

And how long must I behold only the red of your new hell? This storm of yours, that hides heaven and earth, will my death hasten its passing? Then kill me speedily in God's name.

RIFFONI [*Moving nearer to her*]

Why should the Workers' Republic kill you? Perhaps it can find work for you.

QUEEN

What place can there be for me among your sans-culottes and furies? No, no, if you would have me live, let it be far from you.

RIFFONI

What! Swell the camp of our enemy exiles in Bosnavina!

QUEEN

I should leave the Cockpit altogether—let me go to America!

RIFFONI

Aha, so that's the game, that's why old Gripstein was so anxious about his fare. So that great sentimental country is to espouse the cause of beauty in distress, its myriads of rich Valdanians are to write cheques and manifestoes for our destruction. No, Comrade Margherita, if you sincerely share my father's vision, your place is here, helping us to give it substance.

SALARET [*Starting up*]
Vittorio ! What are you saying ?

RIFFONI

It is the only solution. It will please Cazotti and his Western friends. It will bring peace. D'Azollo will be saved. The Royalist exiles will troop back.

SALARET

Yes, to their estates and investments !

RIFFONI [*Furiously*]

I speak to the Queen !

[SALARET *subsides on the throne.*]

QUEEN

But I loathe your methods, I tell you—how can I work with you ?

SALARET

Or under what Constitution ?

RIFFONI

Constitutions were made for States, not States for Constitutions. Let her style herself Queen for aught I care.

SALARET

Queen of the Republic ? Ha ! ha ! ha !

RIFFONI

Am I not practically its King ? You are so conventional, so afraid of words—ah, you were always a

writer. All that matters is that we keep Comrade Margherita among us to inspire us with her noble outlook, to be the incarnation of our dreams, the Lady of our Republic. Come, what say you, Comrade Margherita ?

QUEEN

I have answered you.

RIFFONI

Yes, you dislike our methods. But methods are provisional. The end we dream is the same.

QUEEN

I did not say that. Economic equality is not the light of the world nor even its sure happiness.

RIFFONI

It is the way of reason and brotherhood. Rations and rational are one at root. Shall mankind for ever scuffle for its food like a litter of swine ? Ah, your love of my father's poems is as sterile as the Duke's Socialism. Too many idealists wish that idealism were practicable. Dare to face your own beliefs and to live them.

QUEEN

What is it you want ? What is it you are proposing ?

RIFFONI

I am proposing an alliance.

QUEEN

Between Monarchy and Republicanism ? Is that feasible ?

SALARET

The lady has more sense than you, Vittorio.

RIFFONI

Why do you interfere ? All Europe shows alliances between Monarchies and Republics. And when an alliance between these systems is incarnated in persons——

QUEEN

In persons ?

RIFFONI

In you and me.

QUEEN [*Slowly, as his meaning begins to dawn on her*]
In me—and you ?

RIFFONI

Ah, you shrink. But you were ready enough for an alliance with Prince Igmor ?

QUEEN

You know that ? . . . Then you know to what a horrible political necessity I would have sacrificed myself. They told me it was Valdania's only salvation.

RIFFONI

And may not *our* alliance be its salvation ?

SALARET

Your destruction !

RIFFONI

Be silent !

SALARET

Reds and Whites would be equally revolted.

RIFFONI

On the contrary—they will be reconciled through us.

QUEEN [*Shuddering*]

God did not deliver me from Prince Igmor to hand me over to Riffoni the Red.

RIFFONI [*Savagely*]

But He did, you see.

QUEEN

Let me die then. Your idea is monstrous. Even the Rolmenian proposition was not so cold-blooded. There was love on the Prince's side at least.

RIFFONI

And how do you know there is none on the President's ?

QUEEN

On yours ? Why, you hate me ! You have scarcely seen me.

RIFFONI

My first glimpse was enough for hate at first sight—does love need a prolonged stare ? Nay, was it hate you kindled in my veins, was it not perhaps love—love all the fiercer for my hate of all you stood for ? Your beauty seemed as sinister to me as the blue lake that had sucked down my little brother. But who knows if it was not really your face that drew me back from exile ? Perhaps my whole Revolution was only a bridge to span the gulf between us. Even then you lurked uncaptured, forcing my thoughts to dwell on you, and if I wrested them free from your image, it was only to meet it again in bust or picture, coin or stamp. And yet when you were at last under my roof—under *your* roof—under *our* roof—my yearning to see and face you was shot through with dread. I felt you were more terrible to my Republic than Roxo and all his Rolmenians. But now that I find you no goddess of war, but a friend of my father's dream, not treacherous like our lake, not fatal and sinister, but sweet and simple, I say to you, Margherita—

QUEEN [*Recoiling*]

Do not say it. The blood of my murdered friends cries out against my listening.

RIFFONI [*Exasperated*]

You must listen ! If I have shattered your world to bits, it was only to remould it more justly

QUEEN

The gasping for breath of a child I saw shattered here in your assault, refutes your loud-lunged logic.

RIFFONI [*Subdued*]

My logic may have led me astray. Perhaps I took the wrong turning to my father's Paradise. Your voice leads me back from that red road to his quiet footpaths—I hear the village church bells—Comrade Margherita, put your hand in mine——

[*Holds it out.*]

QUEEN

I cannot.

RIFFONI

Not even to lead me in *your* way ? Come !

[*Grasps at her hand.*]

QUEEN [*Dropping her book*]

Touch that hand stained with my people's blood ?

RIFFONI [*Stung to frenzy*]

It is not the people's blood on my hand, it is the plebeian blood in my veins. But by all your gods I am a better man than your pig-eyed princeling. Your hand, I say !

QUEEN
Never !

RIFFONI
Now !

[*Seizes it.*]

QUEEN
Release me, Signor !

RIFFONI
Not till you——

[*SALARET, who has sat spell-bound on the throne, starts up and strikes the gong twice. RIFFONI drops the QUEEN'S hand. VANNI and his men rush in. OMAR appears at the curtains.*]

SALARET
Escort Her Majesty to her apartment.

[*The GUARDS salute. OMAR rushes to pick up the QUEEN'S book and parts the curtains reverentially. Ceremoniously bowing to SALARET, SHE passes out with stately tread, followed by VANNI and his GUARDS. RIFFONI stands in silent impotent fury.*]

RIFFONI [*Turning on SALARET*]
How dare you interfere ?

SALARET
I had to save you from yourself—and my Republic from your folly.

RIFFONI

You are an old pedant with red ink in your veins.
This woman and I are mates—mates in body and soul.

SALARET

But the woman loathes you.

RIFFONI

As I thought I loathed her. She is the counterpart
created for me—blood and spirit cry it together.

*[Flings out through the curtains. SALARET lets
himself fall into the royal chair, dazed. By the
pillars CAZOTTI re-enters, carrying large placards.]*

CAZOTTI

Ha ! ha ! ha ! What did I say ?

SALARET

You heard ?

CAZOTTI

Enough to grasp the situation. So you begin to see
your idol's feet of clay.

SALARET

When the idol loses his head, one naturally notices the
feet. As I sat here at his request, for he felt the sight
of his darling would un-king him, I found myself
endowed literally with a new point of view. And
looking down on him, as he grovelled before her, I
asked myself why I, the senior, should live like a
schoolboy under the preceptor's rod.

CAZOTTI

Especially when Komak's effusiveness might set the rod swishing——

SALARET

Clairvoyant !

CAZOTTI

And Cazotti was at hand to snap it.

SALARET

Mind-reader !

CAZOTTI

Ha ! ha ! ha !

[*Extends hand, which SALARET grasps*]

So it's a bargain. . . .

[*Smiling*]

You don't remain in the chair, of course. . . . No, no hurry.

SALARET [*Rising*]

So long as I keep the yacht. . . . But I won't have Vittorio killed ! You must deport him.

CAZOTTI [*Laughing*]

What again ? Molp will get tired. . . . But we can't deport him yet. We need his military genius to destroy Roxo and the Rolmenians.

SALARET [*Dazed*]

Then you are not in league with them ? You don't want to restore Margherita ?

CAZOTTI

When I've just asked you for her chair ?

SALARET

You ? You wish to be *King* ?

CAZOTTI

Don't you know the dose of the drug must always be increased ?

SALARET

Then why do you postpone the Queen's execution ?

CAZOTTI

How do you know *Roxo* won't win ? Where should I be then ? As it is, by restoring her to her rooms and keeping her untried, I have proved my loyalty.

SALARET

But what about me ?

CAZOTTI

Haven't you just won her gratitude ?

SALARET

But if *Roxo* is annihilated ?

CAZOTTI

That is what I hope and believe, for then, with the Queen already in our hands, we have only to get rid of Riffoni.

SALARET

Those edicts of yours will do that, I know. But won't we both blow up *with* him ?

CAZOTTI [*Chuckling*]

Not while he signs the edicts and I the pardons. Cazotti the Compassionate, eh ? You are already safeguarded as Salaret the Soft. Be faithful to me and I will save you, even if Komak prove leaky. Nay, for your boy's sake, I will save Komak himself, as I have already saved Stefano.

SALARET

Are you sure you know your Riffoni ? Have a care ! He is capable of turning suddenly like a bull in the arena. With one bound he may unhorse us both.

CAZOTTI

Bah ! Picador Cupid will weaken him hopelessly. Already you have seen him quivering under the darts. My only fear is lest he collapse before he has unhorsed Roxo and Igmor.

[*Sirens begin to sound*]

What is that ?

SALARET

It must be the signal for my boy's Kite Corps.

[*Bugles sound from the Piazza. Excursions, alarums.*]

CAZOTTI [*Troubled*]

The Rolmenians must have broken our line !

SALARET

I'm afraid so.

[RIFFONI rushes in through the curtains in his airman's cap and coat, transfigured equally in bearing, waving a telegram.]

RIFFONI

At last my strategy has come off !

CAZOTTI

Your strategy ?

RIFFONI

The tactics you all but guessed at—to lure the enemy within range of our Kites ! But by letting them out-flank us, not drive us before them ! Roxo has fallen into the trap and is advancing swiftly on Scaletta and annihilation.

SALARET [*Perturbed*]

But if the Kites fail ! Surely you take a terrible risk.

RIFFONI

It is by taking terrible risks that I stand here.

CAZOTTI

Bravo !

[*Grasps his hand.*]

RIFFONI

Roxo is finely fooled. When he used to conduct the manœuvres against King Tito, he always had to work

desperately to get the King to outflank him. Yet he failed to see the same game was being played on himself.

[The faint strains of a band striking up the National Hymn ascend from the Piazza.]

CAZOTTI

We must make Hussein a Marshal.

RIFFONI

Naturally. Ah, the sacred joy of battle for our flag! She asperses our swords but they are holier than her Madonnas, our Kites are more heavenly than her angels. And to think that a moment ago I was possessed of a demon!

CAZOTTI

How do you mean?

RIFFONI

Salaret has not told you?

CAZOTTI

Oh, that! The thought of caressing a Queen flattered your senses for a moment, I never took it seriously.

RIFFONI

Thank you—you knew me better than myself. In that moment of clouded vision our Republic was in the balance, my granite plans ran like wax, and but for Salaret——

[Grasps his hand emotionally]

Forgive me, dear saint, but—in that mad moment—to touch a shrinking hand seemed more wonderful than to build up a State for mankind.

[*The bugle is heard more loudly*]

Ah, I thank the god of chance who sent me this stern reminder. Ouf ! it is good to cast out the demon that has preyed on one's vitals, to feel free again, free to shape with steel and flame, a man among men !

[*Grasps CAZOTTI's hand also for a moment, uniting the triumvirate*]

Imagine it, Cazotti, her pose as a peace-lover deceived even me—I was fooled worse than Hussein fooled Roxo. I forgot that my first sight of her was in a colonel's uniform—now the wily female wears my father's *Songs of Brotherhood* next to her heart.

CAZOTTI

Ha ! ha ! ha ! Why, her military ambitions were the worry of my ministry.

SALARET

The devil fell sick, the devil a saint would be.

RIFFONI

She is wilier than the devil—was she not brought up in a Jesuit Convent ? Though she had dodged capture all these months, she pretended that death was her dearest desire ; and to set my palm itching worse for her, she feigned to shrink from its bloody touch. Ah, let her have the death she whined for—she is too dangerous to live. We three, Cazotti, must adjudge her doom forthwith—we can't await your ceremonial tomfoolery.

CAZOTTI [*Taken aback*]
But my friends in the West——

RIFFONI

To hell with them all and damn diplomacy ! We have stood so far by our own brute strength. Force is all that the West respects—only by ruthlessness can we save our Republic from the foes without and the still more dangerous foes within. Apropos, Cazotti, I veto your pardoning the one-eyed malefactor. He must die at dawn and Komak with him. And that signora and the other ladies your softness has spared so long must join their mistress on the scaffold. It will be her escort of honour, ha ! ha ! ha ! *A rivederci !*

[*Hastens towards the pillars.*]

CAZOTTI [*Waving his placards*]
But these proofs !

RIFFONI

Read them yourself !

[*The bugle sounds a peculiar flourish*]

Do you hear ? Our air-scouts have sighted Igmor's cavalry. I must be in at the death !

[*Exit hurriedly.* SALARET looks at CAZOTTI, as though to say "I told you so." CAZOTTI shrugs his shoulders.]

CURTAIN.

Act Four

[*The same on a waning afternoon some weeks later. The table on the dais is heaped chaotically with correspondence, opened and unopened. OMAR and VANNI are conversing in low tones.*]

OMAR

Courage, friend, this is not like Allah's hell, in which one must remain for ever.

VANNI

I wish I had my two hands to strangle him with as he had Stefano strangled.

OMAR

You have twice as many hands as you have soldiers. But Captain Lambri is *their* job, remember.

VANNI

But can I rely on their hands, the swine? You see——

[*Enter SALARET hurriedly through the pillars. HE is spectacted once more.*]

SALARET [*Suspiciously*]

Why are you not at your posts?

[*They are sneaking out in opposite ways*]

Stop, Omar! I want you to go to the Queen's apartments and send Signora da Grasso here.

OMAR

Yes, Effendi. But without a pass Captain Lambri won't let even her shadow cross the doorstep.

SALARET

These men of the Left wing are very tiresome.

OMAR [*Murmuring*]

May they drink boiling water !

[SALARET *clears a space at the table, bends down and writes.*]

SALARET

Here you are !

[OMAR *takes the pass, salaams and exit.* SALARET *goes to the plain casement and throws it open, revealing the lovely blue lake backed by snow-mountains.* HE *peers out sideways*]

Ah, you can just see her funnels.

[*With a sudden thought* HE *slips off and hides his spectacles.* A band in the Piazza below strikes up a march and troops are heard swinging forward to it]

Already ?

[HE *closes the window.* The curtains part rustling. HE *turns eagerly, but his face falls to see only* OMAR *re-entering.*]

OMAR

The Signora refuses to come.

SALARET

Refuses ? You should have fetched her by force !

OMAR

Bismillah ! It is not *my* harem.

SALARET

Insolent ! . . . I *must* see her before the President returns.

[SIGNORA DA GRASSO *appears at the curtains*]

Ah, the Signora has changed her mind.

OMAR

I am your humble servant who kisses the hem of your garment.

[*Salaams and exit.*]

SALARET [*Advancing*]

At last, *carissima* !

ESTER DA GRASSO [*Retreating*]

Keep your distance. You know you have grown abhorrent to me, that even your letters are returned, unopened.

SALARET

Because you make me responsible for the Queen's condemnation. As if—— !

ESTER DA GRASSO

A truce to words. I have come only to find out why these soldiers are marching. Our guards, who tell

me everything, seem tongueless when Captain Lambri is on the pounce. Does it mean Riffoni is returning?

SALARET

That's why I sent for you. They're off to the station to welcome him.

ESTER DA GRASSO

Mother in heaven! Then he has crushed the rural revolution?

SALARET

As completely as he asphyxiated Roxo and the Rolmenians. He has forced the villages to divide their crops and cattle with the towns, and will thus regain in the towns the prestige imperilled by his edicts and executions.

ESTER DA GRASSO

He has the devil's own luck.

SALARET

But the angels' luck can be ours, Armida. Listen!

[Lowers his voice]

The yacht is ready to sail. Ever since the news of his return came this morning, I have been secretly provisioning it with food and gold. . . . Get your hat and cloak—enough of your things are still there.

ESTER DA GRASSO

Sail with you?

SALARET

Without a moment's delay. We will steam down the river to the Mediterranean, and then hey for the magic islands !

ESTER DA GRASSO

You would abandon your precious Republic and your precious President ?

SALARET

The situation has grown beyond me—sown with traps and menaces for me as well as for you. There are whisperings and rumblings and preparations of I don't know what—and I don't want to know. I am tired of the strain. Far better to leave this witches' cauldron to seethe as it will. I have already sent my younger children to Italy, where they are sure of food at least. Come !

ESTER DA GRASSO

And let the Queen die deserted ?

SALARET

Threatened Queens live long. Already her execution has been postponed.

ESTER DA GRASSO

Only because Riffoni was called to quell the peasant rising. But now that he is coming home—— O my poor Margherita !

[Hurrying out hysterically.]

SALARET [*Desperately*]

Stop, Armida ! His return endangers only you.

ESTER DA GRASSO [*Turning incredulous*]

How only me ?

SALARET

Because I have been able to keep you alive so far on the plea you were necessary to the Queen's last hours. But now that she is not to be executed——

ESTER DA GRASSO

Not to be executed ?

SALARET

No. I ought not to tell you these State secrets, but Riffoni found Western sentiment so outraged——

ESTER DA GRASSO [*Excitedly*]

We know from a New York paper Omar slipped in that an American petition was cabled to Riffoni.

SALARET

Quite so. And it impressed him particularly because it was got up by that same Nicholas Stone whose book we ran through the *Sera*. As, moreover, he desires commercial relations with the States, he decided to forgo her death.

ESTER DA GRASSO [*Bursting into tears*]

Thank God !

SALARET

So you see you have only to save yourself.

ESTER DA GRASSO

For what ? I am not worth saving.

SALARET

Nonsense, pull yourself together, *cara*. The yacht lies moored near the Fort Prison—I can pretend I'm transferring you to your old cell—look !

[Opens the casement]

You can see her funnels !

[From the Piazza comes up the rumble of waggons advancing, followed by raucous cries of a mob. "The Red Flag" begins to mingle with "The Marseillaise."]

ESTER DA GRASSO

What's going on ?

[SHE rushes on the balcony and looks down. Then she utters a scream, rushes back, bangs the casement to, and leans panting against it, as if to shut out what she has seen.]

SALARET

What is it, Armida ? What is the matter ?

ESTER DA GRASSO *[Shrieking at him]*

Murderer !

[HE goes puzzled to the casement]

Don't open it ! They are bringing the guillotine !

SALARET [*Amazed*]

In broad daylight ?

ESTER DA GRASSO

You lied to me—the execution is imminent.

SALARET [*Dully*]

Not before to-morrow morning.

ESTER DA GRASSO [*Wrings her jewelled hands*]

O blessèd Mother !

SALARET

I lied to you because it was the only way to save you. Riffoni telegraphed instructions for both your deaths. Unless you come at once——

ESTER DA GRASSO

Let me be ! If only I can really help her last moments—— !

SALARET

I don't understand you, Armida. You were condemned for complicity in shooting down your land-hungry peasants. You were a frenzied proprietor, not a fanatical Royalist.

ESTER DA GRASSO

I am fanatical for the woman, not the Queen. I had never really known her. It was you who brought me under her spell. Why did you make me love her, if you only meant to butcher her ?

SALARET

We are not butchering her—she had a fair trial.

ESTER DA GRASSO

And do you call that a trial in which, faced with the filthy insinuations of renegade courtiers, the poor angel refused to open her lips? And now your State cinemas display forged films of her amours with Fiuma and D'Azollo. I hear our guards sniggering over them—it is abominable.

SALARET

A little scandal goes a long way, I know. But Riffoni believes fervently in the Fiuma story at least.

ESTER DA GRASSO

Then it can only be to drug the dregs of his conscience.

SALARET

To drug his heart-ache, more likely. He feels her death necessary to the State, and if he did not think her unworthy of his love, the conflict between passion and duty would drive him mad.

ESTER DA GRASSO [*Amazed*]

He loves Margherita?

SALARET

She has not told you?

ESTER DA GRASSO

Not that. The heart that refused to open to the

Court has not been so closed to unworthy me. But that the brute dared to desire her—no, she could not bring her tongue to tell me that. As for liaisons of her own——!

[Indignation and sobs choke her utterance.]

SALARET

Anyhow she was not condemned for them, but for her political crimes. She might have replied to those charges at least.

ESTER DA GRASSO

Why should she stoop to justify herself, when life had become indifferent to her?

SALARET

How you women evade! But if it's true she doesn't want life, why do you want it for her?

ESTER DA GRASSO

Because the tragedy has deepened—she wants it desperately now.

SALARET

Aha!

ESTER DA GRASSO

Your masculine complacency is maddening. That cabled petition from America seems to have unfrozen her, and set her yearning to escape from the cockpit of Europe, and settle incognita in those kindly States; working at her music. I even gather there's a love

romance—some young attaché at our legation presumably, whom she would now be free to marry. Cazotti seems to have told her he was married, but even she has now begun to doubt Cazotti.

SALARET

Poor woman! I wish sincerely I could deposit her in the young man's arms.

ESTER DA GRASSO [*Hysterically*]

Can't you? Can't you take her on the yacht?

[*Embracing him frenziedly*]

I will love you so much, Rinaldo.

SALARET

Impossible, *cara*. Captain Lambri would cut off his own nose rather than lose the Queen's head. He is Redder even than Riffoni. He warned Cazotti, whom he mistrusts, that in the event of a counter-revolution, or even any attempted escape of the Queen, he would stab her with his own hand.

ESTER DA GRASSO [*Recoiling, moaningly*]

How horrible! How horrible!

SALARET

Do not make it more horrible, Armida, by dying with her.

ESTER DA GRASSO

That is the only thing that could make it endurable.

SALARET

You are talking wildly. Think of our nights under the stars.

[Tries to draw her to him again.]

ESTER DA GRASSO *[Breaking away]*

I hate you. You told me when you took me that you had power of life and death. But it seems now it is Captain Lambri. Well, perhaps he is a man too—perhaps——

[Exit frenziedly.]

SALARET *[Dazedly, as she is disappearing]*

What do you mean? You are mad! . . . Stop!

[HE rushes to the gong and strikes it repeatedly in his agitation. VANNI and the soldiers rush in]

Arrest her.

VANNI

Who?

SALARET *[Sobered by the sight of them]*

Nobody.

[HE pulls out his spectacles, cleans them nervously and puts them on]

What I mean is, arrest the setting up of the guillotine. Telephone to Komak that——

VANNI *[Opening his eyes]*

But he is hanged——!

SALARET [*Shuddering*]

Yes, yes, my tongue slipped. Telephone to the new Police Commissary that not even the platform must be put up now. It must be done decently in the dead of night.

VANNI

Into line, Comrades.

[*HE salutes and goes out through the curtains. After a moment SALARET follows him, distractedly re-polishing his spectacles. In the first silent pause the confused songs and cries of the crowd are heard more loudly. A soldier, piqued by curiosity, opens the casement and steals out to look from the balcony. The sounds swell and other soldiers gradually follow him, opening the other casement too. One distinguishes the commands of gendarmes, the calls of labourers moving timber, the brutal laughter of hooligans. VANNI returns to an empty stage*]

Hell and damnation !

[*HE perceives the open casements*]

Come out of that, you swine ! Never seen a guillotine put up before ?

[*They slink in as he talks and close the casements behind them*]

Not that they'll trouble to put one up for you—a lamppost does for the likes of us. Though, come to think of it, if we're all equals and comrades, why should the Queen die more handsomely than my brother-in-law ?

GUARDS

Ha ! ha ! ha !

VANNI

That's not a joke, you sons of bitches. How dare you laugh at poor Fenella's bereavement! Cazotti the Compassionate did his best to save him, but you might as well talk to that mountain-top. And Stefano won't be the last to wear the poor man's necktie. It comes cheaper than Kites, eh? *They're* a nice spirited way of fighting, I must say, for a man who's ever sat a horse or spiked a Bosni. Poison-gas, indeed! If I had wanted to poison people, I'd have been a wine-seller, not a soldier. . . . Why the hell don't you laugh when you *do* hear a joke?

GUARDS [*Feebly*]

He! he! he!

VANNI

Cristo! It's neither grub nor glory for the soldier nowadays. Ah, they want to chop off *her* head now, but it wasn't like that, boys, when *She* sat there——

[*Points to the throne*]

We got our knives into the Bosnis and our forks into the bacon.

GUARDS [*With beautiful unanimity*]

Ha! ha! ha!

VANNI [*Beaming*]

And when a filthy naturalised Bosni blew off my arm, there was scarcely a day but the Queen came to the hospital with chrysanthemums and jellies. Fancy Riffoni carrying a chap flowers!

GUARDS

Down with Riffoni !

VANNI

And God save the Queen !

GUARDS

God save the Queen !

CAZOTTI [*Who has come between the pillars unperceived*]

Treason ! Open treason in the People's Hall ! What does this mean, Corporal Vanni ?

VANNI

I—your Excellency—Comrade——

CAZOTTI

Dismiss your men. You shall answer to me for this, alone.

VANNI [*Confused*]

Right about turn, you swine. March !

[*Exeunt soldiers.*]

CAZOTTI

You indiscreet imbecile ! For aught you knew I might have been the President !

VANNI

But I should have heard the band returning, Excellency.

CAZOTTI

It happens he *is* coming with the procession. But he *might* have slipped home by car to evade assassins.

[*A church-clock strikes the half-hour. HE lowers his voice*]

Fortunately the danger from your folly will soon be over. He dies to-day.

VANNI [*Startled*]

To-day ?

CAZOTTI

Before that clock strikes the hour. How else can we save the Queen, God bless her ?

VANNI

God bless her ! When do I shoot Captain Lambri ?

CAZOTTI

I have told you. Not till you hear a shot from this balcony.

[*Points to the right casement*]

That will be the signal to Fenella's crowd that Riffoni is dead. Then you rush your men towards the Queen's apartments, while Fenella bursts into the Palace.

VANNI

But I've been thinking, Excellency—won't that shot serve to warn Captain Lambri ?

CAZOTTI

He'll hardly hear it where he is. Do give up thinking,

Corporal, it doesn't suit a soldier, and you haven't Fenella's brains. Ah, I wish I could have saved her husband for her. But Riffoni was too rabid.

VANNI

A heart of stone, Excellency.

CAZOTTI

It will soon be cold as one.

VANNI

The saints be praised. And then we shall have enough grub again ?

CAZOTTI [*Smiling*]

Tons. Though your men will no longer get the same rations as you.

VANNI [*Chuckling*]

I shan't tell 'em that.

CAZOTTI

For once you are sensible. Tell them as little as possible—just rush them about. But remember ! no budging till you hear that shot from the balcony—instead of saving the Queen you might kill all of us, if you moved before the mob, or while Riffoni remained alive and kicking.

VANNI

I understand. But if he shouts for help or beats his gong ?

CAZOTTI

If he beats it once, you march in as usual. But if he beats it twice, you're as deaf as *he* was to Stefano's cries for mercy. By the way, take no notice either of the shot that kills him—that will be point-blank and muffled by his damned brains.

[*Re-enter SALARET spectacled.*]

SALARET [*To VANNI*]

Did you tell the Commissary——? Ah, how do you do, Cazotti?

VANNI

The Commissary said, Excellency, that his guillotine carpenters won't work at night.

[*Salutes and exit.*]

SALARET

But surely, Cazotti, he could have waited till Riffoni had passed.

CAZOTTI³

You saw Riffoni's wire forbidding further delay. And new brooms sweep clean.

SALARET

Clean? He has swept into the Piazza the rowdiest and basest elements.

CAZOTTI

So much the better for our *coup d'état*.

SALARET

It is for to-day ?

CAZOTTI

To-morrow the trainload of food that Riffoni has brought home will allay the *stomach* for revolution. To-morrow those whose one hope is to save the Queen will have been disheartened. Ah, his haste to execute her has but precipitated his doom. Truly those whom the gods wish to destroy they first make mad. The bull was already mad the last time he charged—do you remember how I shrugged my shoulders?—already I saw him dragged ignominiously from the arena. Bulls always charge with their eyes shut, and he failed to see that behind Stefano was Fenella, and behind Komak your Guido and the young generation. Had he consented to pardon them, I should have reaped only the profit of clemency, as it is, I reap the benefit of their deaths into the bargain.

SALARET

But the crowd seems as Red as Riffoni—didn't you hear its songs and screams ?

CAZOTTI

My dear Salaret, crowds have no sentiments, sentiments have crowds. Fenella and her gang, aided by your son's pals among the Kite Corps, will, at the given signal, change the mood of the mob. The sight of the guillotine already evokes sympathy for the young Queen. Riffoni is hated even more than he is feared, and the mob is even hungrier than it is

Republican and Socialist. And the moment they know Riffoni is dead, they will clamour for Cazotti the Compassionate.

SALARET [*Shocked*]

He is to die ?

CAZOTTI

He will not survive his return by ten minutes.

SALARET

My God !

CAZOTTI

You *have* no God ! What do you mean ? Don't play Salaret the Soft with me. Your friend chose to come between me and the power I had worked for all my life—he must be removed, he and his fantastic visions.

SALARET

But how will saving the Queen help *you* to the throne ?

CAZOTTI

Who says the Queen will be saved ? Captain Lambri will look after that. Not that her death is necessary—I would prefer to connive at her flight from the realm. But Captain Lambri is impossible.

SALARET [*Hoarse and trembling*]

And who will—look after—Vittorio ?

CAZOTTI

The person who has easiest access to him, of course.

SALARET [*Bounding*]

I ?

CAZOTTI

As if I would rely on a reed ! No——

[*Lowering his voice with a chuckle*]

a man who would far rather shoot Lambri, if he guessed my combination.

[*Points to curtains.*]

SALARET

Omar ? I thought he was whispering mischief. So he is a Royalist !

CAZOTTI

Yes.

[*Chuckling*]

That will cover us. Better still, he is an ex-servant of Gripstein. That will enable us to say, if necessary, that the Jews pulled the strings. Death is a strange glorifier and any reaction in Riffoni's favour will thus pass off harmlessly in a pogrom.

SALARET

I said you were the devil !

CAZOTTI [*Complacently*]

Of course there is also the danger of a reaction in the

Queen's favour. But that is provided for by this letter I am sending to Riffoni the moment he returns.

[*Draws out from his breast-pocket an imposing sealed letter*]

It contains my resignation unless he accedes to the American petition and allows me to pardon the Queen—that will also put me right with America and the West generally.

SALARET

I wonder you tell me all this so nakedly, Cazotti.

CAZOTTI

Since my poor wife died I have no one to admire my combinations—or to call me by my Christian name. Won't you call me Alexis ?

SALARET

When you are murdering the only man I do call by his Christian name ! Are you not afraid I shall warn him ?

CAZOTTI [*Patting his shoulder*]

I always said you were not dangerous. You know that you will breathe more freely when death snaps your schoolmaster and his cane.

SALARET [*With a sudden hope or fear, he scarcely knows which*]

But there is one piece on the chess-board you have overlooked—the protecting knight.

CAZOTTI

Molp ? That man is a mystery. As devoted at heart to the Queen as Omar, he remains ferociously faithful to Riffoni. However a telegram has already met him at the station summoning him to the deathbed of his little Nina at her grandmother's in the country. . . .

[Laughing merrily at the mixture of horror and admiration on the face of his silenced colleague, he points to the throne]

Would you mind taking the chair a moment ?

SALARET

What for ?

CAZOTTI

To witness the climax of the combination.

[Laughingly pushes the wondering SALARET into the royal chair and rings the bell. Enter OMAR. CAZOTTI hands him the letter]

Here is the letter, Omar, and here

[Pointing to SALARET]

is the President back—we will suppose. Now go out and let us see your conception of the part.

[OMAR grins, salaams and exit.]

SALARET

What are we doing ?

CAZOTTI

He is coming back to present my ultimatum to Riffoni, you being Riffoni.

SALARET

I being Riffoni ?

CAZOTTI

How slow you are ! The star part ! Be very busy with these accumulations. But don't open the letter when Omar brings it—else I should have to write a new envelope. Just pretend to read it. You will naturally be perturbed at my threatened resignation. That will be Omar's opportunity.

SALARET

It is a rehearsal of the—— O my God !

CAZOTTI

Your God again ! Omar has really an Allah, yet you see he doesn't turn a hair. Atheists should be at least as godless as believers.

SALARET

I am not an atheist in your sense. There is no God, but a divine sap rises within us.

CAZOTTI [*With a coarse laugh*]

Tell that to Armida.

SALARET

I know I have sinned against my light. But to implicate me in a murder—— !

[*Springs up.*]

CAZOTTI [*Pressing him back*]

Sit down. }

SALARET

I told you I wouldn't have him murdered. . . . Your colleague! What will the world think of you?

CAZOTTI

How dull you are to-day! The letter found on your body—on *his* body, don't look so frightened—will not only seal the legend of Cazotti the Compassionate, but acquit me of any ambition to supplant either my Queen or my President.

SALARET

But posterity will surely discover—

CAZOTTI

Posterity may say what it likes so long as it waits till I am dead. Now do try to look the part—attend to these accumulations.

SALARET [*Rising again*]

Don't torture me! Let Omar rehearse on *you*, if rehearsal is necessary.

CAZOTTI

I have to be at the wing, giving Vanni his cue.

SALARET

Then why doesn't Omar come in and get it over?

CAZOTTI

My fault. The stage directions are he is not to enter till Riffoni is alone. It is a scene constructed for two

characters only; any additional personage might upset the tragedy.

[Pressing him back on the throne]

Now I will leave the stage clear.

[Goes out smilingly through the pillars. An instant after OMAR enters by the curtains, with the letter on a salver.]

OMAR

An immediate answer is requested, Effendi.

[SALARET pretends to open and read the letter, though his hands tremble violently. OMAR drops the salver, whips out a pistol and claps it to his forehead, with a mock cry]

Bang!

[Highly amused, he rushes with his pistol to the right casement, flings it open and leaps on to the balcony. Over the buzz of the crowd he utters a second mock cry]

Bang!

CAZOTTI *[Without]*

Riffoni is dead! *Viva Margherita!* Yes, the bang was your cue, Vanni.

[HE comes in, clapping his hands, as OMAR reappears from the balcony, closing the casement]

Bravo, Omar, *Bravissimo.*

[To SALARET]

But I can't applaud you. Why didn't you fall? . . . Wait, Omar, you have forgotten the letter.

[OMAR, grinning more broadly than ever, picks up the salver and letter and retires salaaming. SALARET collapses half-fainting, huddled on his chair.]

CAZOTTI

Ah, if you had only done that at the right moment !

SALARET [*Springing up fiercely*]

Let me be ! You might have spared me the dreadful foreknowledge.

CAZOTTI

I wanted you to know so as to keep out of the way. Go over to your yacht—it will be your safest position from every point of view.

SALARET

And where will you be ?

CAZOTTI

In the Tower Room—another of my combinations—for it combines freedom from risk with a fine view of the counter-revolution. . . . Good-bye—I counsel you to be off at once. Omar's revolver has six chambers you heard, and fanatics don't like interference.

SALARET

Poor Omar ! Working for you, though he thinks he is working for his Queen.

CAZOTTI

Don't we all work to ends unseen ? Even I may never get to the throne—the greasy plank may give me a tumble at the last inch—ah, your eyes light up at the prospect. Do not deny it.

SALARET

I can't pretend that your restoring Monarchy and Capitalism enraptures me. So this is the end of the Revolution.

CAZOTTI

Isn't it the end of every Revolution—the top of the wheel come round again? But who knows? Bismarck toyed with the idea of a monarchist Socialism, and perhaps we statesmen who have pandered to democracy ought to be grateful to you for showing that the State may be an apiary. But, alas! I fear Socialism presupposes a quality which is not in human nature.

SALARET

But *Riffoni* was honest.

CAZOTTI

Ha! ha! ha! I wasn't thinking of honesty but of omniscience—we are not as high above men as bee-masters above the hive, not even your Riffoni.

[HE goes towards the curtains.]

SALARET [*In a last desperate appeal*]

But Cazotti—Alexis!—is his death absolutely necessary?

CAZOTTI

Absolutely necessary. And absolutely deserved.

SALARET

Because he has killed others?

CAZOTTI

What an idea! Statesmen, like generals, cannot regard life. No, Riffoni must die like all men who adventure in waters too deep for them. He called up forces he cannot control, nourished illusions he cannot maintain, and raised expectations he cannot satisfy. He appealed to man's master-passion, Greed——

SALARET [*Fiercely*]

He appealed to man's master-passion, Justice!

CAZOTTI

Pooh! The sense of justice lives only because each man thinks *he* hasn't got his deserts.

[*Smiling*]

I don't suppose I shall be satisfied even as King.

SALARET [*Bitterly*]

No. Not if, as you say, the dose must always be increased. You will be wanting next to be Emperor of Europe.

CAZOTTI

Why not? It's the only way to turn the Cockpit into a Concert Hall.

[*Parts the curtains*]

Be off to your yacht!

[*Exit.*]

SALARET [*Miserably*]

My yacht!

[*HE opens the casement and gazes out. Above the*

buzz of the crowd comes the thump, thump of hammers.]

VOICE [*From Piazza*]

Bring the cross-piece, you idiots! . . . No! No!
The cross-piece!

[*SALARET shudders and closes the casement. MOLP in uniform and spurred comes in agitatedly through the pillars. SALARET turns, startled at the sight of him.*]

SALARET

You here!

MOLP [*Suspiciously*]

Where else should I be?

SALARET [*Recovering composure*]

In—in the procession.

MOLP

I galloped ahead to caution Vanni and Omar.

SALARET

What about?

MOLP

Guarding the President. My little Nina is terribly ill, dying perhaps.

SALARET

How sad! And such a journey for you!

MOLP [*Swiftly*]
How did you know it was a journey ?

SALARET

You—you told me that having to accompany the President on his campaign, you had to leave her at her grandmother's.

MOLP

Did I ? I thought it was Cazotti I told.

[*Rings the bell*]

Suppose the wire from her village is a ruse ?

SALARET

A ruse ?

MOLP

I know my Valdania. I have practised too many tricks myself. Suppose there was a plot against the President and they wanted to lure me away ?

[*Enter OMAR, who is obviously startled to see him, but swiftly exchanges his surprise for an Oriental impassivity*]

Omar, I have an uneasy feeling a last attempt may be made to save the Queen. Let no stranger approach the President.

OMAR

No stranger shall approach.

MOLP

Swear it to me.

OMAR [*With convincing solemnity*]
By the beard of the Prophet, I swear it.

MOLP

And I swear by the tail of the devil that if anything happens to him, *you* shall pay the forfeit.

OMAR

It will be just.

MOLP

Good. *Addio*, Comrade Salaret.

SALARET [*Uneasily*]

Must you go?

MOLP

How can I stay away?

SALARET

But—but there seems such a savage crowd round the Palace. Listen!

[*HE throws open the blazoned casement. The command of a master-carpenter is heard above the noise and the hammering.*]

MASTER-CARPENTER [*Without*]

Fix in the knife, you fools, fix in the knife!

MOLP

Close it, close it, I know. I came through the mob—

it's only what executions always draw. God spares me from the sight of that death at least.

[Going towards the pillars.]

SALARET *[Making talk to detain him]*
You were in her service, were you not ?

MOLP

She could not bear the sight of me, but to me the sight of her was like an almond tree in the spring.

SALARET

Ah, that must have been in her own springtide.

MOLP

And now, so early, winter is upon her. Poor Margherita ! How dreadful that her death is necessary to the Republic !

SALARET

Is it necessary ?

MOLP

Absolutely necessary and absolutely deserved—the President has convinced me.

SALARET

Absolutely necessary and absolutely deserved. . . .
Ha ! ha ! ha !

MOLP

What are you laughing at ? Isn't he right ?

SALARET

I suppose so. My friend Riffoni is a great man.

MOLP

The greatest I have ever known.

SALARET [*Rather surprised*]

Indeed ? . . . Greater than Cazotti ?

MOLP

Ah, they are the two creatures of our national arms, the serpent and the eagle.

SALARET [*Points to the blazoned throne*]

Yes, but look ! It is the serpent that encircles the eagle.

MOLP

God save us !

[*Crosses himself*]

So it is.

[*Looks at watch*]

But I must catch my train.

[*Moves on.*]

SALARET

Wait a moment !

MOLP

I can't—God help me.

[*With a half-sob he goes out hurriedly.*]

SALARET [*Calling after him*]
Cheer up ! I'm sure you'll find the child better.
[*HE drops exhausted and trembling on a chair. After an instant RIFFONI comes quietly through the curtains in general's uniform, with spurs. SALARET springs up, startled.*]

RIFFONI [*Laughing*]
You look as if I were a ghost ! What's the matter ?
[*Embraces him.*]

SALARET
I expected you to come with bands and banners.

RIFFONI
I came by the subway. I slipped out of the procession, when I found it would have to pass the guillotine.

SALARET
I am glad it spoiled your triumph. Why, to-morrow morning ? Why such brutal haste ?

RIFFONI [*Turns away to ascend dais*]
I was afraid if I saw her again I might waver.

SALARET
Yes, seeing people again makes a great difference. You *ought* to have seen her again.

RIFFONI
Do not scold me, dear Master, I am very tired. Ah, there is my old armchair.
[*Drops on the throne*]

What was it Catullus said about the wanderer dropping into his familiar seat ?

SALARET

Catullus hardly had a throne in mind.

RIFFONI

Nor such a heap of correspondence.

[Takes up letters.]

SALARET *[Alarmed]*

Must you attend to it now ? Let's go for one of our old walks and talks.

RIFFONI

When I am just in my armchair ?

[Opens a letter]

By the way, Molp's child is dangerously ill.

SALARET

I know. He looked in for a moment to admonish Omar and Vanni to super-vigilance.

RIFFONI

Dear Molp ! He has assassination on the brain. Ah, I mustn't forget my promise to him to keep my pistol handy.

[Lays it on the table]

I do hope he'll find his Nina better. How vast it can be—the death of one child. I remember the spacious emptiness at home when my little brother was drowned. Poor Carlo with his long curls and his passion for

paper-boats. Now the passing of myriads seems like the melting of bubbles.

[The military music of the returning soldiers is heard faintly.]

SALARET

Had you to sacrifice many peasants ?

RIFFONI

I spared as many as I could. But I had to think of our foodless cities, and our imperilled social structure. Ah, the ancients symbolised profoundly when they laid human sacrifices in the basement of their buildings. But for how long, I ask myself, will our house stand unshaken, for how long will there be food in its larder ? The unrest seems too deep-seated, one might as well try to extinguish a volcano with a fire-hose. Ah, as I mowed down the poor stupid peasants, who could not understand that the crops must be communised as well as the land, the Queen's words kept rising up against me—yes, even the Duke's—and I wondered—forgive me, dear Master—whether the Workers' Republic was indeed only a forcing house. Perhaps mankind runs to property as the male chin to hair. Can we breed a beardless sex by the razor ?

SALARET

Or ensure a Republic by the guillotine ?

RIFFONI

Do not raise that question—I am unhappy enough.

[The soldiers swing buoyantly past to their music]

Ha ! Do you hear ? She talks to me of love and pity and that was her own music—her own war-march against Bosnavina. Fate has made it her death-march.

[OMAR *parts the curtains, holding the CAZOTTI letter on a salver, but, obviously disconcerted by SALARET's presence, he withdraws, unmarked save of SALARET*]

And yet that vivid flame blown out, that flesh so soft and warm to fatten worms—what madness is this ?

SALARET

Ah, you love her ! You love her still !

RIFFONI

No, no, who could love the creature the trial revealed ?

SALARET

Even were it all true, would she be less desirable ? Molp just said that in her springtide she was lovely as almond-blossom. Suffering has dulled that rosy radiance, but give her freedom and happiness and you will enjoy her re-flowering.

RIFFONI

I shall enjoy ? But she shrinks from my touch.

SALARET

That was her guile, you said. Get her at close quarters—you will soon learn if you are less attractive than the others.

RIFFONI

At close quarters ?

SALARET

Carry her off to the Mediterranean, to some enchanted island. You say you are very tired. Leave all this cumber before your nerves break down. Try a dose of joy.

RIFFONI

Your love for me unbalances you—you forget she dies to-morrow.

SALARET

Take her to-night then. Luckily my yacht is provisioned and coaled and can sail at a moment's notice.

RIFFONI

Eh ? How comes that ?

SALARET

I—I decided to take a holiday when you returned—the strain without you was too great. The moment your wire came, I made arrangements. Come *with* me.

RIFFONI

It is too sudden.

SALARET

Your bag is not yet unpacked. All we need is to manœuvre the Queen on board——

[*Gives him a pen*]

Write me an order for Captain Lambri to hand her over to my charge for secret removal to the Fort Prison, on the ground of a possible Royalist attempt at rescue this last night. I will persuade her lady-in-waiting that I am helping them to escape your clutches. They won't dream you are on board till the yacht has sailed. Come! You must slip away at once.

RIFFONI [*Momentarily carried away*]

Where is the yacht?

SALARET

Moored near the Fort. Look! You can just see her funnels.

[*Opens the blazoned casement. RIFFONI descends from his throne.*]

RIFFONI [*Looking*]

But why this lightning speed?

[*The sinister sound of hammers beats up from the Piazza.*]

SALARET [*Shuddering and closing casement*]

There is your answer.

RIFFONI

But I could reprieve her for a day or two.

SALARET

And suffer again all the agonies of indecision and desire, the more agonising because your nature is action? Come, obey the law of your being!

RIFFONI

And to-morrow morning—how do we explain her absence ?

SALARET

Obviously on the ground that the Royalist rescue we apprehended was effected during the transference.

RIFFONI

Humph. Highly ingenious for an academic philosopher. But obey the law of *your* being, Salaret, and do not outrage your sense of right in your oversolicitude for my happiness. Why, when I merely grasped her hand in this very room, you rightly restrained me; why do you egg me on to violence now ?

SALARET

Who spoke of violence ? Opportunity, which makes the thief, favours also the lover. You could woo her at your leisure.

RIFFONI

Leisure ! My work gives me none.

[Re-seats himself and takes up a letter.]

SALARET *[Desperate, burning his boats]*

Your work ? Pouring water down volcanoes !

RIFFONI

I said that in a moment of weariness.

SALARET

In a moment of insight. Our Republic is an abortion.

RIFFONI

You believe that! *You!* All our painful parturition——?

SALARET

Worse than wasted. If only I could get you away, give you a little happiness.

RIFFONI

I never sought happiness.

SALARET

It seeks you.

RIFFONI

It must find me at my post.

SALARET

That post need not be Valdania.

RIFFONI

How do you mean?

SALARET

It is an impossible country; illiterate, priest-ridden, rooted immovably in the dead past. A new idea needs a new world. Let us sail to some more plastic country—Paraguay, perhaps, the scene of so many social experiments, whence we could get a leverage over all South America, the continent of the future.

RIFFONI

It is a great conception—like all yours. Unfortunately, as Gripstein pointed out to me, when I went to him about the *Sera*, you can't overturn Capitalism without capital.

SALARET

But there is gold on the yacht—masses.

RIFFONI

On board ? How ?

SALARET

Isn't it a State yacht ? I store the Treasury bullion there. In these turbulent times it is best to keep the whereabouts of our gold unknown.

RIFFONI [*Smiling*]

So Gripstein thought. But we can't carry off Valdania's finances.

SALARET

You talk like a bourgeois. Since we shall devote them to our ideal——!

[*Enter* ESTER DA GRASSO, *with* OMAR *protesting.*]

ESTER DA GRASSO [*Frantically pushing past*
OMAR]

Stand aside !

[OMAR *disappears*]

O Signor Riffoni, be merciful. I do not ask you to stop the execution. But stop that hammering, for

God's sake, or remove Her Majesty to a room which does not give on the Piazza. I have kept her from the window, I have already pulled down the blind and closed the shutters, I have tried to drown the sounds with her own music. But underneath, I know she has divined, that every stroke of the hammer beats on her heart. Ah, she is so young, so young——!

[*Sobs.*]

SALARET

Calm yourself, Signora. We will remove her from the Palace altogether—to the Fort Prison.

ESTER DA GRASSO

Ah, yes, yes, my old quarters—that will be quiet, and free from this ghoulsh mob.

SALARET [*Writing*]

The President will sign this order to Captain Lambri. Bring her to me, dressed for the transference, with her things for the night. You will accompany her, of course.

[*HE gives the paper to RIFFONI, who, hypnotised, signs it. SALARET hands it to ESTER DA GRASSO.*]

ESTER DA GRASSO

God bless you both for this mercy at least!

[*Exit as she came.*]

SALARET

Wasn't that providential—if I may use the word?

RIFFONI [*Rapt*]
And I shall see her again !

SALARET

Day after day—come, let us get your bag. My car is at the gate.

RIFFONI

She will not smile, I fear. Only once did I see her smile. It was like the spreading of sunshine over a crystal pool.

SALARET

As soon as you reach the yacht, send the car back for us. It is not three minutes by the short cuts.

RIFFONI

Ah no—they can't be true, those stories—with that smile !

SALARET

I will bring her to the yacht with her Dame of Honour.
[*Takes his arm to get him to move.*]

RIFFONI

But she is coming here, you said—I shall see her at once.

SALARET

No, no—you might be indiscreet—she might smell a rat.

RIFFONI

I shall speak only of the Fort Prison—I shall not mention the yacht. You shall take them on board and send the car back for me.

SALARET

No—you must be on board first—surely you can wait ten minutes.

RIFFONI

And if your tyre burst in bringing her—no, no, I have starved long enough!

[*Enter OMAR.*]

OMAR

Signora da Grasso begs that Signor Salaret will come to her at once.

SALARET

Ha!

[*OMAR salaams and exit.*]

RIFFONI [*Feverishly*]

Is it a hitch? Does the Queen cling to her room after all?

SALARET

Who can say? Women are so unexpected. Or perhaps it's that ferocious Captain Lambri refusing to let them go.

[*Hurries out.*]

RIFFONI

The insolent dog! Put him in his place! . . . To watch her re-flowering——

[HE muses ecstatically. The curtains part and OMAR appears with the big heavily-sealed letter on the salver]

What is it?

OMAR

An immediate answer is requested, Effendi.

RIFFONI

Put it down—I can't attend to it now.

OMAR

But it is from Comrade Cazotti, Effendi. I dare not return, empty-handed.

RIFFONI

The devil take you both!

[HE opens the letter. OMAR's hand slides to his bosom. MOLP enters through the pillars]

Ah, you're back! You've had reassuring news?

MOLP

No, but I could not bring myself to catch my train—I was haunted by a vision.

RIFFONI

Indeed? Of what?

MOLP

Of a serpent encircling an eagle.

RIFFONI

The arms of Valdania ? Why should that keep you from little Nina ?

MOLP

I was reminded of my duty to protect Valdania's President.

RIFFONI [*Deeply touched*]

You put your duty to me before your love for your child ?

MOLP

Not entirely. I wasn't sure the telegram wasn't a ruse.

RIFFONI [*Huskily*]

Don't whittle it down—you are a quixotic idiot. Get a car and be off at once.

MOLP

With all respect, now I must wait for the reply to my telegram of enquiry.

RIFFONI [*Facetiously covering his emotion*]

That's not so idiotic.

[*Looks at letter*]

Ha ! ha ! ha ! How odd ! Why didn't he say so before ? Cazotti threatens resignation unless I allow him to pardon the Queen. . . . What would you have me reply ?

[*Takes up pen and paper.*]

MOLP

The eagle does not take counsel of the sparrow.

RIFFONI

Don't talk like our friend here. What would *you* like me to do ?

MOLP

You will always do what the welfare of the Republic demands.

RIFFONI [*Touched and troubled*]

Will I, indeed ? Ah, if you knew how nearly the serpent had dragged down the eagle ! Answer my question—what would *you* do if only *your* welfare was concerned ?

MOLP

Sooner than hurt a hair of her head I would go to the block myself.

RIFFONI

Brave Molp ! . . . I am sorry the welfare of the Republic demands my acceptance of the resignation.

[*Writes and gives the answer to OMAR, who salaams stoically and exit*]

Don't look so gloomy, Molp. Who is Cazotti to pardon an angel ?

MOLP [*Ecstatic*]

You will pardon her yourself ?

RIFFONI

Not even I am worthy. She will escape.

MOLP

Escape ? By your connivance ?

RIFFONI

And yours.

MOLP

Thank God ! Ah, how great you are !

RIFFONI

Tut ! Tut ! *You* are the big man. We are pretending to transfer her to the Fort Prison with her lady-in-waiting, but in reality we shall put them on board Salaret's yacht. He is worn out, poor man, and sees the Republic not in red but in black. A sea voyage will pick him up, give him fresh faith.

MOLP

He will sail down the river then ?

RIFFONI

Yes, into the Mediterranean. And land the Queen at any port she chooses.

[*Re-enter SALARET frenziedly.*]

SALARET [*In wild relief*]

Ah, you are alive ! And Molp is back ! Splendid !

RIFFONI

What are you maundering about ? What did she want ? You may speak before Molp.

SALARET

I didn't see them—they were dressing—Omar must have—er—misunderstood. Captain Lambri is bringing them.

RIFFONI

Good. I was just going to explain to Molp that I want *him* to act as escort—it will be less suspicious—and then he can return, wounded.

MOLP [*Startled*]

Eh ?

RIFFONI [*Smiling*]

Bandaged, anyhow—you said you would go to the block for her. You will explain that a party of Royalists attacked you and carried off the Queen to the mountains.

SALARET

A false track—an admirable addition !

MOLP

It won't look very plausible entrusting her to a single escort.

RIFFONI

Why not ? If our idea was to keep her removal

unobserved. Do motor down at once, Salaret, and instruct the captain to get up steam. Then return at top speed and wait at the gate till Molp brings down the ladies.

SALARET

But you ?

RIFFONI

Quick ! I hear them coming.

[Bundles the semi-dazed SALARET out between the pillars, while the QUEEN and ESTER DA GRASSO in travelling attire, the latter carrying a little bag, enter the opposite way, with CAPTAIN LAMBRI in their wake ; a truculent officer with a fierce moustache, who salutes the President, clicking his heels]

I thank you Comrade Lambri for your vigilance. Colonel Molp will see to the transference of your prisoners. Molp, will you have the courtesy to relieve the Signora of that bag ?

[LAMBRI glares ferociously as MOLP takes it]

Of course, Captain Lambri, we must not attract Royalist attention to the Queen's removal. But as soon as it is quite dark, please station your company outside the Fort Prison.

[CAPTAIN LAMBRI, pacified, salutes and goes.]

QUEEN

I am grateful to you, Signor Riffoni, for your consideration.

RIFFONI

I sincerely regret it is the last I can show you.

ESTER DA GRASSO [*Hysterically*]

But why can't you spare her? I know they cabled you from America to pardon her.

QUEEN

Hush, dear Ester! You haven't fastened your brooch—it will fall out.

[*Fastens it for her with fingers that do not falter*]

Signor Riffoni must follow his sense of his Republic's necessities.

RIFFONI

I thank you, Madam. You as a ruler have learnt that one cannot always please oneself. To pardon you would set Captain Lambri's faction raging—more bloodshed might ensue. But I have just instructed Colonel Molp—by the way, that bag is surely too small——

QUEEN

It is only for one night.

RIFFONI

Ah well, I expect you can pick up more *en route*.

QUEEN [*Almost breaking down for the first time*]

Ah, do not put it off any longer. That would be the cruellest kindness.

ESTER DA GRASSO

Yes, kill her—you shall not torture her any longer!

RIFFONI

But it is the end of her torture, I am trying to tell you.

[To QUEEN]

It is to freedom, Madam, that Comrade Molp will escort you.

ESTER DA GRASSO [*Ceasing to sob*]

To freedom ?

QUEEN [*With her first sob*]

To freedom ?

RIFFONI [*Smiling, to hide his own emotion*]

Only—don't let the cat out of that bag—you must tell your friends you were rescued by a Royalist raid.

QUEEN [*Dazed*]

I am free to go where I please ?

RIFFONI

Where you please. Even to America.

QUEEN

Oh !

[*Breaks down and covers her eyes.*]

RIFFONI

I must risk your raising opinion against us.

QUEEN

But—Signor Riffoni—my only ambition is to sink quietly into the Melting Pot.

ESTER DA GRASSO
And marry an American.

QUEEN [*Blushing*]
Ester——!

RIFFONI [*Huskily*]
So much the better. . . .
[*Clearing his throat*]
Now, Molp, march!

QUEEN
Addio then. How can I thank you?
[*SHE offers him her hand.*]

RIFFONI
You would touch my hand?

QUEEN
It is stained with blood, but not—I feel—with dishonour.

RIFFONI
Ah, Madam!
[*HE bends and kisses her hand*]

The pioneer's hand can never be clean, and we who create civilisation are like the swine-grease through which perfumes are distilled for the delicate nostril. But, in so far as is practicable, I will try to work in your spirit.

QUEEN
In your father's spirit, Signor Vittorio.

RIFFONI

Put it as you please—I shall always feel you are the Lady of our Republic.

QUEEN

God grant you may remember. . . . We are ready, Colonel Molp. Ah, God forgive my selfishness ! The Duke ? What of him ?

RIFFONI

D'Azzolo ?

[*Laughs boisterously to relieve his emotion*]

Ah, it is wonderful how he always goes out of my head. Talk of *his* memory !

[*Starts writing*]

Of course you shall have your Duke—the Royalist raid will capture quite a bag, eh, Molp ? Larger than that ! Ha ! ha ! ha !

QUEEN

God bless you.

RIFFONI [*Handing the order to MOLP*]

Bless Molp—it is all his doing.

[*To the astonished MOLP*]

No, I know you don't understand ; you wouldn't be Molp if you did. Do you remember the Duke asking me that night what I would do with his yacht ? Won't he be amused at my putting him on it !

ESTER DA GRASSO

The Duke's yacht ?

RIFFONI

Salaret's now, more or less—it is *that* you are to escape on.

ESTER DA GRASSO

With Salaret on board ?

RIFFONI (*Genially*)

Oh, yes, you shall have the Professor to see you through. Colonel Molp, unfortunately, cannot leave Valdania. His little girl is dangerously ill.

ESTER DA GRASSO

O my God ! No, no, kill her rather. . . . O blessed Virgin !

RIFFONI

Kill the child ? What can you mean ?

ESTER DA GRASSO

It is a trap !

[*Tugs at the QUEEN's cloak*]

Come back, Your Majesty. Ah, I thought it was too good to be true.

QUEEN

What trap ? What are you in a fever about ? . . . Poor little Nina ! I am so sorry, Colonel——

ESTER DA GRASSO

Ah, I ought to have understood earlier—when the Fort Prison cropped up again.

[*Turns on RIFFONI*]

O you unspeakable—— !

QUEEN

Ester! Compose yourself! I don't understand you.

ESTER DA GRASSO

No, Your Majesty, you never did. I should have confessed everything earlier, God forgive me. All my life I have had lovers—ah, I knew you would shrink from me. But better that you should shrink from me than rush into that! Is it so disgraceful to give oneself when the heart is free to open or close? I did not think so till your innocence came like a rebuke—there was always romance to redeem. But here—through dread of the thorns, I whose life had been all roses—through a cowardly fear of pain and death, I have sunk to my gaoler!

[Breaks down, hides her face.]

RIFFONI

To your gaoler? Which gaoler?

ESTER DA GRASSO

As if you did not know!

RIFFONI

But I know nothing.

ESTER DA GRASSO

So I was led to believe. But now I see that the devilish sense of power has wrought on you likewise. Only you flew at higher game and bided your time. Come back, Margherita, that hammering is less dreadful.

RIFFONI

Stay, Signora. You cannot go, leaving such imputations. Do I understand that you are afraid that if the Queen goes on board the yacht——?

ESTER DA GRASSO

She will find *you* there—as I shall find Salaret. O, I could endure these orgies myself if it would really save *her*. But that she too——!

RIFFONI

These orgies?

ESTER DA GRASSO

It was only towards the end of the cruise that Salaret discovered I was his special affinity.

RIFFONI

Salaret? . . . You are raving!

ESTER DA GRASSO

Alas, my sanity has stood the shock.

RIFFONI

Molp, do you know anything of this?

MOLP

It was before my time. But I did suspect something lately between Salaret and the Signora.

ESTER DA GRASSO

But I only let him in once—the first night—ah, you can never forgive me, Madam.

QUEEN

I forgive you now, Ester. You have saved me from worse than death.

[ESTER *falls sobbing into her arms*]

Hush! We must go back. Give me the bag, Colonel Molp!

[MOLP *hesitates. In the tense silence the banging of the hammers penetrates again.*]

RIFFONI

Do nothing of the sort, Molp! Ah, Madam, your friend would destroy, not save you. Go in tranquillity; we need the guillotine for a real criminal. I wish I could utterly deny the devilish design you attribute to me, but it had been exorcised—by this brave Comrade—even before your horror had brought home to me its full baseness. I had resolved to seek oblivion of you and purgation of myself in my work for the Republic. . . . Ah, how can I believe in the Republic now?

[*Sinks broken into his throne*]

Go, Comrade. Salaret should be waiting in his car by the time you get to the gate. Send him up to me and drive off at once with the ladies, and let the captain cast anchor immediately. Then they will be sure Salaret is not on board—nor I.

QUEEN

Come, Ester.

ESTER DA GRASSO

No, no! He is play-acting. What is to prevent him coming on board afterwards? I would not trust him on his oath.

RIFFONI

You must trust me without it, Signora, for God in heaven I have none.

MOLP

But *I* have, by God, and I swear I will never leave Her Majesty till she is safe among her friends !

RIFFONI

But your Nina—— !

MOLP

She must live or die without me.

[ESTER DA GRASSO *looks at MOLP, then takes the QUEEN'S hand and moves towards the pillars.*]

MOLP

Excuse my preceding Your Majesty—I have to show the pass.

[*Exit ; they follow.*]

RIFFONI [*Hurrying down from the dais*]

One moment, Madam ! Accept a parting gift.

QUEEN [*Moving a few steps within*]

Your pistol ?

RIFFONI

Loaded. Your final safeguard.

QUEEN [*Taking it*]

To think that I came to this Palace with love in my heart and go with death in my hand.

RIFFONI

I trust at least you go to happiness.

QUEEN

It is a happiness merely to go—to be released by God . . . to feel my forehead finally free of the crown. . . .

[With sudden gaiety SHE curtsseys to the empty throne]

Good-bye, you !

[Exit.]

RIFFONI

Ah, she is younger already—she will flower again. . . .

[Calls after her]

But the Duke ! Don't forget to collect the Duke !
Aha, I remembered him at last. Ha ! ha ! ha !
ha ! ha !

[Mounts the dais in hysteric, half-sobbing laughter, and, dropping on his throne, rings the bell. Enter OMAR.]

RIFFONI

Give me your pistol, Omar.

OMAR *[Utterly disconcerted]*

Effendi !

RIFFONI

You carry a pistol for my protection, do you not ?

[OMAR nods, speechless for once]

Give it me !

[Hypnotised, OMAR slowly hands it over.]

RIFFONI

It is loaded ?

OMAR

In every chamber.

RIFFONI

Good. . . . I have parted with mine. You may go ! . . . By the way, you gave my reply to Comrade Cazotti ?

OMAR

Yes, Effendi.

RIFFONI

Did he say anything ?

OMAR

Not to your humble servant.

[Salaams and exit. RIFFONI examines the pistol in a silence through which the hammering is heard again. Enter SALARET by the pillars.]

RIFFONI [*Sardonically, playing with the pistol*]

Ah, Salaret, all going well ?

SALARET

To perfection. Steam is up and the car gone off. We have only to follow secretly. But I was surprised to see the Duke in the party—is that wise ? Won't he put a spoke in our wheel ?

RIFFONI [*With ferocious gaiety*]
In *his* wheel, Salaret. Isn't the yacht his ?

SALARET
Ah, you are gay at last.

RIFFONI [*With savage blandness*]
Thanks to my wise Master. . . . So in five minutes
we shall be off to El Dorado !

SALARET
We carry El Dorado with us, ha ! ha ! ha !

RIFFONI
Ah, the gold, you mean. I had forgotten that . . .
[*Smiling*]
Suppose the Duke should claim it ?

SALARET
I said he would interfere.

RIFFONI
Interfere with your Department ! Not while you're
alive, I promise you.

SALARET [*Grumblingly*]
Your weakness for the Duke will yet cost you dear.

RIFFONI
But not as dear as all that, Salaret. There are
millions, eh ? Enough to turn Paraguay into a
Workers' Paradise !

SALARET

Trust me. Cazotti won't be so pleased to be Finance Minister now.

RIFFONI

Ah, that sticks in your gizzard, does it? But if Paraguay prove recalcitrant?

SALARET

The world is wide.

RIFFONI

Yes, all those far-stretching seas and continents—and yet it could all be dropped down a rift in the sun and lost like a little green bead. And the sun itself could be sucked up into Sirius like my little brother into the lake, with scarcely a ripple. What do you suppose this measureless mass of mud we call the universe is in such a whirl for, Salaret?

SALARET

For love and joy, Vittorio. Remember Goethe. Dry and dead is all theory, green and beautiful is living. Wait! Wait! You will soon cease to ask questions of the universe.

RIFFONI

You mean, if the Queen—but suppose she proves marble-cold? Do you think Signora da Grasso——?

SALARET

Oh, but I am sure the Queen won't resist you. And you don't like Signora da Grasso, you said.

RIFFONI

I said she reeked with sex. And so should I by that time—shouldn't I? The tiger, they say, once it has tasted blood rarely returns to a milk diet.

SALARET [*Perturbed*]

But Signora da Grasso is not the only lady still unexecuted.

RIFFONI

Ah! That is an idea! Are there others as handsome?

SALARET

Three at least—handsomer even.

RIFFONI

It would be a pity to leave them to Cazotti.

SALARET

Damn him!

RIFFONI

Is it too late to collect them? . . . What glorious revels we could hold in the moonlight!

SALARET

Glorious! . . . Ah, you mean to kill me! Armida has betrayed me.

RIFFONI [*The pistol in his hand*]

You have betrayed the Republic—and with it humanity's last hope. We were to show ourselves

supermen, you and I. A simple soldier, unscrupulous in his profession, puts us to shame as men even. Ah, I was ready to credit to nerves as tired as mine your despair of our work, to attribute your seduction of me to solicitude for my happiness. But I did not know you were a Tartuffe and a thief, that the Workers' Republic was to you merely a treasury and a brothel. Judas !

SALARET [*Stung by the exaggeration of this tirade to face his accuser, and finding himself desperately calm, now the long suspended sword has fallen*]

Ah, Vittorio, you make me wonder what is to be said for Judas ? Men are not so simple. I sometimes think that monarchs who say " we " are the only true psychologists. How could I not care for the Republic—my whole life-work ? How could I not care for you, my life-long supporter ? Do you think I had no moments of heart-sickness when you turned the State my books projected into a shambles ? I defended you before the Duke, but he was right. You would not wait to educate and evolve : your Socialism is only of the forcing house.

RIFFONI

But not of the bawdy-house.

SALARET

I know I fell. But if I tried to drag you down, too, my motive—believe me—was not wholly selfish, nor wholly without risk. Even more than Molp I was trembling for your safety.

RIFFONI

I was not playing for safety, but for achievement.

SALARET

You are sure it was not for power ? You speak as if I alone had sucked voluptuous profit from the Republic. Your lust of blood wrought infinitely more misery than my lust of the flesh.

RIFFONI

My lust of blood ?

SALARET

Even now you are yielding to its secret lure.

[RIFFONI *lowers his pistol*]

Shall I ever forget how you gloated over the asphyxiation of Prince Igmor ? You must be in at the death, you said. Was it because Igmor dared to love your darling ? And then your lust for applause. Never to move without salvos from reeking guns and stinking lungs.

RIFFONI [*Overwhelmed*]

If you knew how I have longed to be a shepherd in his wicker-work hut, open to wind and weather !

SALARET [*Sarcastically*]

And in practice you make a throne-room your bureau and a throne your office-chair—do not tell me you sleep on a camp-bed, it is the same megalomania, aping a Napoleon on his campaigns. And this passion of yours that I sincerely sought to gratify,

even if it gratified my own, why was it for Margherita and no lesser woman? Cazotti was right—the thought of fondling a Queen tickled you, as Napoleon was titillated by an Emperor's daughter.

RIFFONI

Have done! Travesty me if you will, but not my thought of Margherita. Is it not enough she has faded into the inaccessible—like all my visions of the Republic? . . . Ah, to what end do these mirages beguile our souls? Why are we not as the animals, which have ignorances but never illusions?

SALARET

And why hug the illusions, since not being animals we can grow in wisdom? Kill me if you will, Vittorio—I have had such hours as I did not even know life held, when I was merely a scribbling phantast, a biped with a quill. He who shoots at a star misses. Let us proportion our aim to our reach. Can you learn nothing from life?

RIFFONI

I am too tired—I can learn only from death.

[HE mounts the stone step before the plain casement and throws it open. The light has been fading and the snow mountains appear, rosy with sunset. A few stars are already twinkling]

Why is the mob grown silent?

SALARET

The guillotine was all but up when I came by—the thought of death must be awing them.

RIFFONI

What children ! It is life that is awesome, not death. . . . Ah, there she goes, the yacht, like youth throbbing with purpose ! And there rolls the purposeless universe, drifting like an old hulk in the ocean of space. . . . On this very balcony, Salaret, my father died, in his dream of love. And my forcing house is as visionary. Ah, they are both futile, force and love, while our breed remains so poor.

[*Steps out.*]

SALARET

Where are you going ?

RIFFONI

To my father !

[*Disappears on the balcony. A shot rings out.*]

FENELLA'S VOICE [*Yelling from below*]

Riffoni is dead ! *Viva* Cazotti !

CROWD [*In Piazza, echoing her*]

Cazotti ! Cazotti ! *Viva* Cazotti !

[*OMAR rushes in.*]

SALARET [*Gazing out*]

You are spared a crime. He is dead.

OMAR

You have killed him ?

SALARET

Yes, God help me.

[HE falls on the stone step. The cheers for CAZOTTI swell into a great rolling thunder. OMAR rushes out through the pillars. SALARET grasps frenziedly at the Red Flag and tears it down]

The Republic is dead ! Long live King Cazotti !

CURTAIN.

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